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HILLS AND PLAINS:

A VERY OLD STORY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Wm. L.

LONDON:
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HILLS AND PLAINS:

A VERY OLD STORY.

CHAPTER I.

SI NON VERO, BEN TROVATO.

“Not up yet, Flo?”

“Not quite, dear! but if you want your tea very badly, make it for yourself; I will send you out the—dear me! where did I put them last night, I wonder.”

“What?”

“The keys.”

“Oh! no matter; when you lost them last time I got a special duplicate made for the tea-caddy.”

No reply having been returned to his last remark, and a coloured gentleman with a venerable beard

and aspect appearing at the same moment with a bubbling kettle, Mr. Henry Lony Ochter, Bengal Civil Service, Assistant to the Magistrate of Chillum-pore, and the hero of this narrative, proceeded to make tea for himself.

The astute reader will not require to be told the hour and the place of the foregoing short dialogue: the hour was 7 A.M.; the place, a fair-sized bungalow; one speaker standing in the verandah, the other in an adjoining room. As for the period, it was in the month of April, in one of the years of the nineteenth century of grace.

The gentleman lit a cheroot, and dropped into a chair of the kind known to the suffering reader and his bearer as an "Aram ke chokee;" whether so called in Oriental paraphrase of arm-chair, or whether the term is to be considered genuine Hindostanee and translated "chair of ease" on the *lucus à non lucendo* principle, it has not, the writer believes, been yet decided. When Mr. Lony Ochter had removed a mass of white cloth and felt, with which he had been torturing his brows for the last hour and a half as a sanitary precaution, during his ride, against

the scarcely risen sun, and when he had been himself removed, by the aid of two servants and one of the verandah pillars, from a pair of huge yellow jack-boots, forbidding to eyes and nose, without which he found it impossible to transact any outdoor business, he looked out upon the world a very fair specimen of the Anglo-Saxon of three-and-twenty. Some inches over the middle height and well built, he had light brown hair, blue eyes, large mouth and lips, very good teeth, and a composite nose. The face showed no talent, but plenty of energy, honesty, and good-humour—poor qualities after all with which to get on in this virtuous world. My readers must see such a man every day of their lives. His history must be told in as few words as possible up to the time of his attempting to make tea on this particular April morning. I may remark, in parenthesis, that no man, of any pretensions, can, should, or ought to make this melancholy infusion, and certainly no bachelor, since the invention of brandy and portable soda-water machines.

Lony Ochter's father, a colonel of the Bengal Blues, died suddenly of apoplexy, at a large mess

dinner, just after young Henry was sent to Harrow. He was an amiable old gentleman who liked his beer, and whose beer liked him; he was knowing in capons, tealeries, and quaileries; he could not ride or walk, but this was not of much consequence in his regiment; he had been home once since he came out as a cadet, but he returned to India in six weeks, greatly disgusted with England and English ways. I may not linger over his peculiarities; who ever hears of such a man now-a-days? Lony Ochter's mother, who was many years younger than his father when they married, was considered a great catch. She was second cousin to the niece, by marriage, of Sir George Ardowa, K.C.B., Vice Chairman of the Court of Directors. She had, consequently, no difficulty in obtaining a civil appointment for her only son, and, at the time this story opens, she was living at the Hill station of Paharnauth with three unmarried, and more or less marriageable, daughters, whose acquaintance we shall have the pleasure of making hereafter. The widow was well to do: she had married early, did not now look very old, thanks to a good jointure, good feeding, an undiscoverable

hair-dye, a *soupçon* of *rouge*, and an invaluable receipt for the destruction of the budding beard and moustache of female elderliness. Her only care was the getting her daughter "settled"—an ambiguous phrase much used by anxious mothers, even in the present day. Uncharitable people hinted that "mother" Ochter would have no objection to "settle" herself a second time, if she saw her way; but this was probably a slander. She had reached the age when, with most women as with most men, money and good living become the paramount objects: her waist had been absorbed many years before; she still loved dress, but who ever knew a woman of any age, shape, or colour that didn't? Has not some miserable misogynist said, that no woman would die happy if she were to know beforehand that she might not look to advantage in her grave-clothes? She liked having young men about her house; but this was only for her daughter's sake: and she continually declared to her contemporary lady friends, when she grew mellow over the "one glass of beer at tiffin" (which she took solely because Dr. Soudagur, the station doctor, told her she must swallow or die, though she never could

like it), that "her daughters once settled, she would go quietly back to England, and spend the remnant of her days with her dear single sister, who, poor thing, was not as happy as she might be." Her friends warmly applauded this resolution, and, as is usual in such cases, did not believe a word of it.

The only great sorrow of her life, second, of course, to the poor dear colonel's awfully sudden death, was her son Henry's awfully sudden marriage. After Harrow, he had gone to Haileybury, that noble institution, then in its prime. In those days the demon Competition, that peculiarly plebeian monster, had not yet seen the light. No impious Governor-General had volunteered to manage India with military officials alone. India got no civil servants unless from the bosom of the "Alma Mater," Haileybury; without Haileybury, England could not have held India for a day. Young Lony Ochter's "Director connection" alone was a sufficient guarantee for his having secured, in his three or four terms, the necessary quantity of mathematics, jurisprudence, and political economy; as to the other accomplishments, equally necessary, according to good autho-

rity, for the young civilian's good management of the gentle Native, Lony Ochter could ride well to hounds, bite a terrier's tail, dress neatly, talk boldly to ladies, give an opinion upon claret, and pronounce his A's. With most brilliant prospects, therefore, did he entrust himself to the good ship *Shahzadee*, Captain Prawn, to which he was recommended warmly by his Indian relatives on account of the capital curries provided therein. I may not stop to tell the incidents of the voyage; how Lony Ochter got deeply in love while the ship was in the trade winds; how he all but perpetrated marriage at the Cape; how he quarrelled with the captain, who threatened to report him to the President of the Belatee Panee Board at Calcutta,—suffice to say, that after a "clipper-speed" voyage of four months, our hero found himself deposited, without accident, in the Promised Land.

Neither can I stop to inform the patient reader, how Mr. Ochter qualified himself for the public service, during the months allowed him for study in the Sewer-less City. The Government of that day did not deprive its élèves of all chance of becoming

useful servants, by hurrying them away to up-country stations, as is done now-a-days, in the mistaken notion that a man can study among the thousand distractions of a dwarf colony in the Mofussil, when removed from all the inducements to continuous work for which Calcutta is so celebrated. Lony Ochter made the best possible use of his time; he hired a Pundit to teach him Sanscrit and Arabic, and a Moonshee of ten Mezzofanti power for Oordoo, Persian, and all the dialects of Hindostan. He went to live in the Rajhans Club for economy's sake; he took a four-anna share in a drag for the same reason; in order to make a little money he joined a racing confederacy, and had the management of the training-stable with the five thorough-breds, which were to carry all before them at the Chandneypore Grand Metropolitan Meeting. He was made an honorary member of the famous Dosutee Club, and, on the opening day of the season, stuck his first pig and broke his best Arab's off fore-leg in a way which gained the applause of the oldest members of that sporting association. Blessed with the most Mark Tapleyan spirits, and with

unlimited credit, he was as happy as a prince, and though he had only a few hundred rupees a month, he made both ends meet surprisingly, as he wrote to his fond mother at Paharnauth. He had not gone into the Meehurbanee Bank for more than ten thousand rupees, and his personal debts did not exceed half that; but he did not consider it necessary to go into those trifling particulars in his communications with that respected lady. Not one of his fellow-students worked up the Institutes of Menu half so cheaply. Remember, please, O my reader! that no scurvy competition-wallah had at this time defiled the select service; no man, who sat a horse like a tailor, who did not know the difference between a head-stall and a surcingle, who was low enough to attempt to live upon his pay, and to say that he succeeded, had yet disgraced its ranks. Why the competition system has not been assigned its due place amongst the causes of the late mutiny, the wondering writer must stop here to consider. Why was it omitted by the illustrious hero Bawl Gobble, Esq., Bengal Civil Service, in his learned work on the "Causes and Consequences

of the Insurrection?" Baby-eating, bone-grinding, Christianity, cartridges, as provocatives to sedition and murder, he has discussed in detail; but in the elaborate chapter upon "Prospective Mutinies" he has entirely forgotten to dwell upon the highly exasperating effects, upon the excitable nature, of the competition-wallah's mode of life. How could the clients of the court respect a man who walks, actually walks to Cutcherry, and stays there from morning till night, and who lives in a small house on two hundred rupees a month? How could the people of a district tolerate a mild individual in glasses, who travels over it in a cold season, hearing cases all day long, and who never presses hundreds of ryots into his service, or forces them to trample down their crops, and beat their sugar-canes to pieces, to procure food for his powder. The putting men from the army into high civil place was quite enough to make the people ripe for revolution. Might not the competition-wallah have been "the last straw?"

Lony Ochter's Calcutta studies were cut prematurely short. He was seen one day by the

Governor-General "tooling" the four-in-hand down Chowringhee ; indeed, he very nearly shaved off the starboard step, with the scarlet native perched thereon, of the great man's phaeton ; and as far as trotting went, he gave him the "go-by" in the most ignominious manner.

The lord, with a strange smile, said,

"Smart horses those ; who is the coachman, Mr. Lefafa ?"

The secretary knew, too well, the man who had condemned loudly his best Burgundy at his last grand dinner, and loved him accordingly ; he gave the necessary information, and in the next batch of orders Mr. Henry Lony Ochter, to his unlimited chagrin, found himself declared qualified for the public service, and directed to proceed to Chillumpore. Mr. Lefafa took the opportunity of writing a note couched in the kindest language to Lony Ochter, impressing upon him the necessity of despatch, as the Governor-General had named him in particular for the above station. After a cold interview with the manager of the Meehurbanee Bank, having sold his share in the "trap" at a

tremendous sacrifice, but not his interest in the training stable, which was his constant hope (indeed, he offered it as security to the manager of the Meehurbanee, and was greatly surprised at his non-acceptance), he got to Chillumpore, and took off his predecessor's hands the house, in the verandah of which he is now sitting waiting for his wife.

It will have been gathered from the title that the narrative now put forth (founded upon certain memoranda, the history of which is of no importance, and personal reminiscences) is but an account of certain passages in the lives of a few individuals, who collectively formed a small circle, or a series of small circles, in Anglo-Indian society. It has more claim to the title of a fragment than a story. In it will none of the unities of the orthodox novelist be regarded. The commentator will speak sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the first. His characters will come on when he needs them, and move off again, perhaps without introduction in the first case, or word of farewell in the second. Petty inaccuracies, and possibly anachronisms, will abound.

The story may be curt where it ought to be prolix; prolix where it ought to be curt. If such gross violations of all fiction rules and observances can be tolerated, Mr. Henry Lony Ochter's biographer will rejoice. If not, he can but mourn over the incomplete shape in which the memoranda were left to him. But here is a preface at the end of the first chapter! an unpardonable breach of every known rule already.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING A VIRGIN.

THE gay station of Nakpore (in bygone days the head-quarters of a frontier division, now a howling wilderness of deserted houses, roofless churches, and desecrated churchyards) was rejoiced to hear, in the beginning of the cold season in 18—, of the arrival of Miss Flora Armit, only daughter (surviving) of Lieutenant-Colonel Armit, commanding 84th Foujdars. The present writer remembers that he was among the first who caught sight of her face, and that he was quite dazzled by her beauty and grace. How many years have gone by since then, and how few are left who could trace back, with the poor old foggy who is penning these lines, the events he purposes recording! On this point he makes no reservation: a foggy he knows himself to be, without being reminded of it by his attenuated legs, his unwillingness to walk, his

anterior expansion in the region of his lower waist-coat-button, and, worse than all, the cold reception he meets from young and blushing Hamadryads, whom he occasionally catches himself approaching with a smirk and a graceful scrape, as if the very sight of them gave him rejuvenescence. He hears them tittering behind their bouquets when he turns away, but he forgives them, for the sake of the days and the faces they remind him of; not that they can come near the girls of his day. Though a foggy, the writer can boast of a peculiar freedom from narrow prejudices, but on this subject he is convinced. But to my tale.

Flora Armit, at eighteen, was undoubtedly a very pretty girl; a glance told me of her beauties; a slight acquaintance, of her defects; and, as she is the *prima donna* on my narrow stage, both must be detailed for the benefit of those who take any interest in her. She was slightly over the average feminine standard, with a lithe, elastic figure, and a gracefully set head, well garnished with flaxen hair, which, in favourable light, might have been called golden. She was extremely fair, with an evanescent tinge of the dear

home colour still glowing on her cheek ; her brow was smooth, blue-veined, a little too broad perhaps ; and beneath it lay in well-shaped orbits a pair of large limpid cold blue eyes, guarded by faint eyebrows and lashes. Her eyes were her weakest point. They had no light in them, except, perhaps, when she was in a passion ; but I never saw her under such unfavourable circumstances. The want of life and expression in Flora's blue eyes chiefly assisted me to get rid of the effect her other charms produced upon my ardent soul, in the days of my youth. Her nose was delicate, and its "sensitive tip," as Tennyson would call it, was turned in a very pleasing way, not downwards. Her mouth was well shaped and small, but her teeth were decidedly below par. Flora knew this well, yet she knew also that nature had gifted her with very respectable dimples, which could not play to advantage unless she smiled somewhat widely, and it was painful to see her struggling between her anxiety to make the said dimples "tell," and at the same time not to show what her pretty lips concealed very satisfactorily, so long as they were not separated. Without such harsh hypercriticism, Flora

was a very perfect *blonde*; and we all know how, and why, in this land of the sun, *blondes*, however "heavily weighted," distance *brunettes* beyond all "placing." Miss Armit in twenty-four hours was the rage of Nakpore.

The colonel's quiet house, previously seldom disturbed at midday, was beset by buggies and steeds of all descriptions. Loud was the clanking of spurs in his verandah, shrill the scream of the field officer's Arab yelling at the ensign's scrubby tattoo in his compound. The poor colonel and his wife, who were seldom troubled with visitors out of the regiment, now had no midday sleep for a fortnight. The colonel, a most guileless and kind-hearted man, declared he could stand it no longer, that he never anticipated such consequences as these from having a pretty daughter, that he would close his doors except against his usual intimates, &c.

But the old gentleman had one near him who would not permit him, in the innocence of his heart, to be guilty of such intense folly. Mrs. Armit was as good a woman as ever breathed. She was loved by the young fellows of the 84th Foujdars, as

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colonels' wives (I mean middle-aged ones) seldom are now-a-days; and she well deserved it. Numberless were the tales they used to tell of her unceasing kindness. She thought nothing when Ensign Rowan, just arrived, was struck down by brain-fever, of nursing, night after night, the poor raving lad, and of making jellies for him with her own hands. When two hot-headed subs of the regiment were seen from the "Mall" one evening, fighting in the verandah of their house like schoolboys, and were put under close arrest, with a black eye each, by that energetic officer, Brigade Major Pivot,—did she not go herself straight to the brigadier and obtain their pardon? When Lieutenant Lack's young wife died in her confinement, did not Mrs. Armit take charge of the infant she left behind her, though the heart-broken Lack could not be comforted, and refused even to see the child for a twelvemonth? Mrs. Armit's claims upon the affection of her husband's officers were of this kind; so no wonder was it that her word was law with them. She was but a woman though, and her first thought after the fascinating Flora's arrival was, "I must put a stop to my *chota hazree* in future;

and I must take care that those boys don't come in every night to tea any longer, on the pretence that they have no appetite for the mess dinner;" for the young fellows came in and out of the house very much as they pleased, and they were always welcome in any number, until Flora "joined," bringing with her new cares for Colonel and Mrs. Armit.

"No, James," said the good lady, "we must do exactly the opposite to what you say: you must hint, as gently as you can, to Captain Cooly, that we really cannot see anybody in the mornings and evenings any more. The others will hear from him, and will of course stay away."

"My dear!" said the colonel, "how can you ask me to do such a thing? Surely one mouth more (he meant Flora's) does not add so much to our expenses." He had not the remotest idea what his wife was driving at.

"My dear," Mrs. Armit answered firmly, "you know our grand object must be, to see Flora comfortably settled, and you know as well as I do that none of our officers have any pretensions to her, and that some one of them will be certain

to turn Flora's head, and how will you feel then?"

"I am sure!" protested the colonel, whose hospitable soul was chilled by his wife's depreciation of his "boys," as he called them, "when you and I were young, though your father was civil and sessions judge, and I a poor ensign——"

"Things were very different then, James," said Mrs. Armit, interrupting him sharply; "and we must not compare our beautiful Flora's prospects with what ours were." (Mrs. Armit, close upon forty-five, could afford to be severe upon Emily Dabel, her former self, who was by no means a beauty.) "So many years ago too. No daughter of mine shall marry a poor subaltern or captain either!"

"She might do worse," muttered the discomfited colonel, who, however, pulled down his flag without another shot.

It is a trite and lamentable fact, that every mother who loves her daughters is a matchmaker. She considers it her bounden duty to "tout" for husbands for them, when they reach the connubial epoch, as it was hers to suckle them in their helpless infancy.

Has any one ever met the matron who had the rashness to say, "My dear Jane, or Julia, in the choice of a husband think less of money and rank, than of disposition and habits. Prefer a poor man whose attachment promises to be faithful, to a rich and capricious man who may tire of you in a month. It is possible to be happy on a limited income." Did the mother ever exist who could make a guilty speech of the above sort?

Mrs. Armit, kind and sensible as she was, was no exceptional case. She was as convinced as other mothers are, however much they may have been themselves disappointed, that the first grand object was, to procure a man eligible in the true worldly sense to be her daughter's husband; and the second was, until such a man should appear, not to allow Flora the chance of forming an imprudent attachment to any one of the good-looking, warm-hearted, penniless officers of the 84th Foudars, whose society she herself had hitherto really enjoyed.

But her daughter Flora, delicate piece of machinery though she was, required no such careful "fencing." She was much wiser than was mamma when of her

own age. She look at a subaltern! She might, after some years, allow a senior captain on staff employ to offer himself. But she thought she must be very unfortunate if she were ever compelled to look so low. No! Flora's pretty head kept her heart in order, and the latter organ she took good care not to "wear upon her sleeve" to be pecked at by the countless daws fluttering about her in plumage of gorgeous red and gold. Though brought up close to a large garrison town in England, she had not, since she attained to years of discretion, shown the slightest symptom of that scarlet fever which still preys upon young English lasses, and from which all her contemporaries at Mrs. Basanglais' school suffered more or less. She had been deported early from India; but, notwithstanding, just as children carry home "*alta mente repostum*" a select stock of Indian phrases, which are never uttered until they return again to the land of their birth and childhood, so Flora would appear to have had engraved on her heart a select stock of Indian-English ideas, the most prominent among them being the immense superiority of a black coat to a red.

For a sensible girl like this no precautions were needed, such as her anxious mamma proposed; and fortunately the latter good lady discovered it before she had driven her husband to the terrible *coup-d'état* which would have ruptured beyond all healing the ties existing between the Fouj officers and her amiable self. Had she taken this fatal step, she would have fallen from her high estate for ever: no longer would she, during the long winter marches, be the honoured guest of the mess; no more on such occasions would her health be drunk with that solemnity which, demi-comical as it was, had too much real feeling about it not to delight her kind heart beyond measure. Never again, as had happened once when the regimental Sangrado was ill, and she herself seriously so, would a sub start off in the rain on a pouring night to summon the nearest doctor, who was stationed thirty miles off.

Having found out, then, that Flora was so prudent, Mrs. Armit announced to the colonel, greatly to his delight, that her fancies were foolish, adding, that if their daughter did become attached to one of the

Fouj officers, it might be for the best. My kind readers will excuse this little *bunken* on Mrs. Armit's part: she believed in her inmost soul, that no greater misfortune could befall Flora than a N.I. husband; but such petty deceptions are a necessary ingredient in our domestic happiness, and they are the last peccadilloes women should be taxed with.

There was some reason for Mrs. Armit's desire for a good husband for her only daughter: she had had for many years bitter experience of the *res angusta domi* of a regimental lieutenant. Her heart ached still, when she thought of their sick children long ago, for whom they had scarcely the means of providing little essential luxuries, much less change of air,—of long hot-weather months, during which she never passed the walls of her cramped compound, because her husband could afford no conveyance for her,—worse than all, of her two dead little ones, that had gone to heaven together suddenly one time when she and her husband were marching, for economy's sake, from one station to another, and sickened when they were miles away from help.

With such scars upon her loving heart, is it to be

wondered that Mrs. Armit worshipped, with most implicit confidence in its virtues, the almighty rupee, or that she looked upon it as the ægis which should shelter her darling Flora from sorrows, such as she had herself gone through in years long past. She loved her husband; but in the privations above hinted at, did she not more than once murmur to herself, "I might have avoided all this by accepting old Mr. Beakkul of the Sudder?"

He had solemnly proposed to her many years before, never doubting the result; but she had been trained in a different school from Flora's, and had fled shrieking with laughter from the room when the jaundicey old gentleman began to talk to her of the *dik* his *nokur log* gave him, of his large *tulub*, finally saying how *raze* he should be if she would make a *bundobust* for a *shadee* with him. Nothing on earth could make Mrs. Armit so happy as to see Flora the wedded wife of such another as Mr. Beakkul; and great was her comfort when Flora, in a short conversation, let her mother know how exactly their ideas on this point corresponded. They did not change, then, their usual mode of life; the Fouj lads came

in and out of the house just as before, and ere a week elapsed three subalterns, a serious captain who had saved a little money, and an ensign who had spent a great deal more than he was likely to receive for many years, were found to be "off their feed" and in a distracted state of love generally.

Flora was greatly amused in watching the progress of the disorder in their several cases, and had many debates with herself as to which would "come to scale" first. Mamma knew all about it too, and was sorry for their condition, not but that she had some secret satisfaction in witnessing the power of her daughter's charms, though brought to bear only on such inflammable material as that of which the hearts of Indian officers are notoriously composed. She would have grieved, however, if Flora had done anything in the "trapping" way. This, I am happy to say, the young lady scorned. She reserved her snares for higher game, and her manner throughout was that of a sensitive, shy girl, as no doubt she was, scarcely able to reply in more than half-a-dozen words to any observation addressed to her.

The colonel and his wife loved their daughter

dearly, but she returned a measure of affection far below theirs. The parental instinct resists distance and age, and burns strong throughout a lifetime. It is not so with the filial instinct. Children separated in their long clothes from their parents have never learnt to love them, and when they rejoin them grown up it is too late to learn. We are miserable creatures of association, it must be confessed, and without association filial love goes out beyond all hope of rekindling. Sons and daughters, brought up after the Indian-English fashion, can never love parents as those do who are never so separated.

On this hypothesis it may be understood why, before very many weeks elapsed, Flora began to feel tired of her home and its owners, and of the noisy fellows who came in and out and sat open-mouthed devouring her with their ardent glances. It happened, by some not unusual misfortune, that Nakpore was without a representative of the class to which the vestal Flora had devoted herself. The Political Agent and his Assistant were both Benedictines. There was not a bachelor civilian in the place. Flora felt desperately dull and ennuyée; she took to old novels.

and sleep. A look of encouragement from her would have procured half-a-dozen offers of Foujdar hearts and hands within twenty-four hours; but this look she would not vouchsafe, for Flora had a very sensible idea, that if it got abroad that she had already rejected so many, her market might be spoiled, for it would be concluded that, unless she had at least flirted rather indiscriminately, she could not have made such a number of conquests. Nothing could have been more prudent or ladylike than Flora's behaviour.

Such was the state of affairs when, one morning, Colonel Armit received the following letter from his sister, Mrs. Skewbald, wife of a major of that name, commanding the left wing of the 99th Buffadars, then detached from the head-quarters of the regiment, and stationed at Chillumpore.

January 18.

"MY DEAREST BROTHER,

"How happy I was to hear of the safe arrival of my darling niece Flora! What a comfort it must be to Emily and you to have her with you! You said nothing in your brief letter to me of her beauty, and of the sensation it caused at Nakpore, though you must have known nothing in the world could give me so much pleasure. Give the dear girl a thousand loves and kisses from me. It appears but yesterday when she lay on my lap a little baby, and such a charming one too! I

heard all about her début from my old friend Mr. Gagur; so you see I was not quite dependent upon you for an account of her. John joins with me in entreating you, before the hot weather comes on, to let Flora come and stay with us for a short time. I am so anxious to see her. It is no use, I know, asking you and Emily to come also, though it would delight us very much. Ours is a small station, but we may find some amusement for dearest Flora. A thousand loves again to her and to Emily.

“Ever, my dearest brother,

“Your affectionate sister,

“CHARLOTTE SKEWBALD.

“P.S.—We cannot promise much gaiety, not even a ball; we have very few officers, and, besides them, there is, I believe, but one gentleman in the station, a young civilian, who can be expected to dance.”

Though the colonel was anxious to provide some change of scene for Flora, he would have preferred finding it for her in any other place than Major and Mrs. Skewbald's house. He had never liked the 99th Buffadars; he had even an antipathy of old to the major, and he had not readily forgiven his sister Charlotte for marrying him. However, he read the letter out to Flora and Mrs. Armit. The younger lady, had, of course, heard of her aunt before. She did not pay much attention to her letter, but her little pink ears might have been seen to prick up at

the last sentence of the postscript. Mrs. Skewbald, unconsciously, like very many other women, adopting one of Bacon's epistolary rules, had reserved for the last words what she felt to be the most important part of her communication. Her mother would not have consented for a moment to Flora's leaving her except for the last few words also. The colonel's opinion being of the least value, it is scarcely necessary to give it. He was certainly opposed to Flora's going. Mamma determined at once that she should, and she, accordingly, opened the discussion of the question on the most scientific feminine principles.

"Very kind, I am sure, of Charlotte, but we can't spare Flora so soon, for all that. Surely you do not wish to leave us yet, my darling?"

"No! indeed, mamma; I am as happy here with you as I can possibly be."

For shame, Flora! you said to yourself only yesterday, after finishing the last volume of *Old Maids and Young Ones*, that you wished you could sleep for the whole twenty-four hours, except at meal-times and on band evenings!

"I think, Flora," said her mother, "you had better yourself write a nice note to your aunt, mentioning how much obliged you are, and, indeed, all of us; but that you do not wish to go from home just yet. What do you say, papa?"

The colonel had not spoken yet. His first feeling was against the proposed visit; he would miss Flora very much; he took great pride in her. She was the companion of his morning rides, Mrs. Armit being beyond side-saddle age, and not a very early riser. Again, there was his dislike to the Skewbalds. At the same time, he fully expected that his wife and daughter would have greedily caught at the visit, and that the opposition thereto would have been his business. Puzzled then was he, when he found both declaring against it; and he found himself bound, in honour to that secret spirit of opposition which lurks in the breast of both sexes, to state, that he would miss Flora very sadly, but that a little change would enliven her, and that aunt Charlotte would feel their refusal very much.

"But how could she expect us to part with Flora

so soon?" urged Mrs. Armit. "Why not ask Charlotte here on a visit?"

Mrs. Armit was perfectly safe in making this proposition, for Mrs. Skewbald would not come without the major, and our colonel would not have that estimable field officer in his house at any price.

"Oh, no! that would never do," said the colonel, quickly; "our house is not large enough for visitors."

He reserved the true reasons for his disapprobation as not suitable to be told to his daughter, but she had heard them long ago from her mother. Women take a strange delight in family disagreements which don't include themselves directly; and Flora had extracted from her confiding mother every item of information she could impart to her about her relatives on both sides. In what she heard, the enmities and the feuds prevailed over the *amicitiæ*; but is it not the same in all families, great and small?

"I don't see," continued the colonel, who, in terror of the alternative, had become a warm partisan of Mrs. Skewbald's invitation, "why Flora should not go."

“As you please, my dear!” replied Mrs. Armit, in well-managed accents of submission, and without permitting a symptom of the gratification she felt to appear on the surface. Flora said she would go, if her father and mother desired it. And so the matter was settled, to the satisfaction of everybody, except the good colonel, who was obliged to conceal his disapproval carefully.

CHAPTER III.

A LOVER AND HIS FRIENDS.

"SEEN the new spin?" said Captain Stapleton, as he took off his sword and drew a chair to the table in the western verandah of their mess-house, around which the other officers of the wing of the gallant 99th Buffadars were seated, discussing tea, tobacco, and the station news of the morning.

"Rather think we have," was the universal rejoinder.

"A very superior piece of goods. Who imported her?" asked sour old Brevet Major Surruk, who made it a point never to ask or answer a question, without saying something coarse or bitter.

"She is a daughter of Armit's, the C O of the Foujdars," said Stapleton.

"The slowest lot I ever met," Bob Burtun added, an unpleasant-looking, aged subaltern, who was sup-

porting nature with a compound of rum, egg, and nutmeg.

"Not a bad old fellow, Armit," somebody said; "he is a brother of old Skew's."

I blush to have to state that Flora's aunt Charlotte was known by this irreverent designation to the officers under her husband's command.

"That accounts for old Skew having her to stay with her; she wants to marry her to somebody; so look out, major!" said Stapleton, making a pleasant grimace at Surruk, who happened to be, at the moment, chasing the leg of a fly or two round his tea-cup. It is surprising how the servants in India always do manage to put matters of this sort in one's tea.

"I'm the man for her money; how much has she got?" Surruk replied, with a withered grin. "I don't suppose she has much more fortune than a side-saddle and band-box: in that case I leave her to you, Stapleton."

"Devilish kind of you, I am sure."

"Hasn't lost her marks yet: not at all bad points, though rather a vicious colour. She's a first-rate

stepper—clean forehead, hoof a little too large for the pastern—withers rather pointed, but the head and crest are capital.”

This enumeration, issuing between the intervals of the puffs of a short pipe, from the mouth of Charlie Haupper, at the other end of the table, put a stop to the conversation between Stapleton and Surruk, which would have ended in a quarrel, as their conversations generally had done for the last ten years.

“Light in hand?” inquired young Sims, the junior amongst them to whom Haupper was talking.

“Well, no. I found her rather heavy, but I saw her step out very well when Ochter took the reins.”

“Ha! Ochter, eh? Ten to one in ‘chicks’ they are married before the hot winds,” old Surruk broke in, who would not have risked a bet to save his life; and as this was well known, his sporting offer fell to the ground.

“Very likely, indeed. But how do you know so much about her?” said Stapleton to Haupper.

“Why, I dined at Skew’s last night; the old ‘un wants me to lend them my buggy mare, and is

become deuced civil all at once. A few more turns will finish Ochter; he is very far gone. She seems to take it coolly enough, though; I wonder whether she really likes him?"

"I should say not," said Stapleton; "but it is not at all easy to judge. She looks just the sort of woman to step out and marry a man because her friends recommended him; without previously committing herself in the least. But we must shut up: here comes the victim himself."

Lony Ochter's beaming face appeared at the same moment between the pillars of the compound gate, and he rode up to the verandah, patting the neck of a fiery little chesnut Arab, which he managed to perfection. He was breaking him in, just as he was being broken in himself, poor fellow! and for the same hand.

"Just in time; take "a life" before the sun gets too hot, Ochter!" said Haupper, who, cue in hand, was waiting for his morning pool rather impatiently. "Did you get home all right last night?"

"Yes, thank you, but I passed the deuce of a night; I feel rather seedy still, indeed."

"Perhaps you smoked a cheroot too much," suggested Surruk, in a tone of malicious sympathy.

"No!" replied Lony Ochter, seriously; "lady party, you know. I think it must have been the salmon."

Ochter knew very well it was the execrable Moselle, which came from the mess, and which his auditors rather prided themselves upon; he had previously made its acquaintance, but as Major Skewbald offered him nothing else, he was obliged to drink it with a fore-knowledge of the consequences.

"Hot coppers are the devil," said Burtun, who rarely took part in any conversation which did not bear upon potable fluids. "Brandy is the most wholesome tippie after all, with a nip of rum now and then as a tonic. Have one of my 'doctors' now; it will do you no end of good."

"Thanks! no, old fellow; I shall be right as a trivet directly. I hear Haupper gnashing his teeth in the billiard-room. Come along."

Ochter had felt the change from Calcutta to Chillumpore most severely. He was driven wild by loneliness and discomfort. Living in a house

by himself, he endeavoured at first to realize the delights of bachelor house-keeping, and succeeded as miserably as do all else who make the attempt. He resolved to live like a hermit, and work like a horse, according to the Lord Eldon precept, to toil all day at Cutcherry, and all night at the Regulations. "He had had amusement enough at Calcutta, and, by Jove! he must try to save some money and lessen his debts." He held out for a week; at the end of that time he found himself snubbed, plundered, and starved. His immediate superior, Mr. Jones Sykes Ulney, the magistrate and collector, was a morose, middle-aged man, whose wife had gone home with the children some years before, and refused to come out again on numerous pleas which he was unfortunate enough to see through. He lived altogether to himself, disliking and disliked, caring nothing for his work, yet delighting to torture others with it.

The opening of Ochter's career in Cutcherry was the same as most young civilians possibly experience still. In his first agony of utter incomprehension of everything going on around him, he rushed into

Mr. Ulney's office, and frankly begged of him to help him.

"Don't be in the least alarmed, Mr. Ochter," he said, with a scarce concealed sneer; "things will go on equally smoothly whether you understand them or not. Look as attentive as possible, do exactly what that old gentleman who is squatted by the right of your chair tells you, sign as quickly as possible the heap of native papers he will lay before you in the evening, and by five P.M. you will have earned your day's salary. Excuse my wishing you good morning, but my work is rather heavy just now;" and Mr. Ulney gave the signal to his two readers, one on each side of his chair, who commenced declaiming volubly, while he himself, as little put out by the accustomed noise as is the miller by the sound of his wheel, went on with the composition of an affectionate letter to his wife, who was, according to his last accounts, miserably ill at Cheltenham; announcing to her his intention of cutting off all remittances in future, unless she could inform him in reply that the children were placed at school, and that her own passage

to Calcutta was taken. Young Ochter's exuberant spirits alone made this man hate him.

At home our hero was as miserable as at Cutcherry. He could get no food of a Christian character: he subsisted chiefly upon ghee, and hens whose laying days were over, the carcasses of which, split in twain, were served up to him half burnt and half raw. He got a supply of liquors from Nubbee Bux's shop, the only one in Chillumpore, but there was nothing drinkable amongst them. He was offered by his khansaman for breakfast, the first morning, a dish of rice and another of yellow gravelly grain, surrounded by a thick unctuous fluid of the same colour, the sight of which nearly made him ill. The native, seeing horror in his master's countenance, and fearing a storm, hastened to assure him that his predecessor, Mr. Beegha, never ate anything else for breakfast but "dholl bhaut."

Ochter suffered no more than does, to the present day, any unmated gentleman who is thrown upon his own resources in a small station. Life under such circumstances is simply unendurable. The grand remedy is, according to those who have tried it—

matrimony. Find a "*placens uxor*" to share your miseries, and you feel them no more. This plan has never failed yet. My experience is not small, and I must record, in honourable testimony to the patient sufferings of the long roll of husband-martyrs, that I have rarely known a man, however notorious his domestic misery, acknowledge even to his oldest friend that he was unlucky in the choice of the wife of his bosom. Captain and Mrs. Simkin are well known to devote their joint existence to bickering. The servants, who leave them in disgust, tell sad tales of their squabble; you see them yourself on the Mall every evening, scowling at each other from opposite sides of the carriage; yet ask Simkin to dinner, expand him as much as possible with such food and wine as he never, poor devil! sees at home: then talk to him about the married state. Will not the desperate impostor declare to you that he never knew thorough bliss until he had won Mrs. S., and will he not endeavour to persuade you that he has never known an unhappy moment since?

The last person to consult when you find your-

self approaching a love crisis, is a married man. Expect no impartiality from him. All "griffs" know that when they are about to invest in a doubtful horse, the worst person to obtain advice from is the man who has been himself "let in." The principle in both cases is the same.

Mr. Ochter was rescued from his solitary discomfort by a letter from Major Skewbald and the officers of the left wing 99th Buffadars, inviting him to become an honorary member of the mess. He had much pleasure in accepting, and became, as we already know, very intimate with them. The reader will have noticed that the wing was not at all badly off for officers. Besides those to whom he has been introduced, there was, of course, Major Skewbald commanding, and Kookrie, the acting adjutant and quartermaster. Skewbald and Kookrie, being both married, rarely appeared at mess, which institution did not suffer much in consequence.

The Buffadars always prided themselves upon sticking to the regiment; they were not like other fellows "mugging up" languages and "sucking" far and

wide for staff appointments, doing all they could to shirk their duty.

“No! When soldiering is a man’s profession, and his regiment his home, he has no right, sir, to cut both, as so many fellows are doing. They must rejoin sooner or later, and pretty figures most of them cut when they do. Why, when old Sungeen of ours came back the other day, after fifteen years of ‘political,’ he said himself he could not even turn out a guard.”

You were sure to hear a speech of this sort from any one of the Buffadars if you ventured to discuss the “absentee question” with him, and you were bound in return to applaud their *esprit de corps* to the skies. They deserved credit, indeed, for so philosophical and patriotic a sacrifice of their own interests to that of the regiment. On the other hand, it must in fairness be mentioned, that if you asked the opinion of a “staff employ” man of another regiment, upon the merits of the 99th Buffadars, he would answer to a certainty, “Not a man worth his salt in the lot; deuced bad name at headquarters,” &c. &c.

A sweeping condemnation of this sort has never any truth in it, and was probably elicited by a feeling of jealousy in the case of the jolly 99th. The writer knew the regiment very well before his *morosa canities* incapacitated him for convivial enjoyment, and many a pleasant evening he passed at their hospitable "seesoo" board (for the honest fellows despised mahogany.) At their symposia many of the achievements were performed for which the Bengal army was illustrious so many years ago.

It was Jarrun of the 99th who backed himself to drink a wall shade full of claret in two gulps, and did it. That wild Irishman O'Carthy, who swallowed at a draught a tumblerful of neat brandy and ate the bottom of the glass afterwards, spent his brief but glorious Indian career with the regiment also.

How well I remember the mess-room! In the morning a faint but decided alcoholic odour hung about the place, such as one perceives when passing by the door of a tavern in a crowded locality about the same time in England. In the place of honour in the room hung a correct model of the arm of Jopaul Singh, a famous wrestling sepoy, who was

much cherished in his time by the officers, who used to back him against the presidency. His end was a melancholy one: he was going to his home on sick leave, and was challenged in one of the stations he happened to pass through. Though worn out by ague, he met his man, who threw him easily and ruptured his spleen at the same time. The good fellows of the 99th provided handsomely for his family, and put up the above model to his memory.

In one corner stood the hogspear of poor Tom Bloxam, a wild but noble-hearted lad, for he was not twenty-one when he was killed in a duel by a brother officer, who had sneered at the 99th band's performance one night, and whom poor Tom considered it his duty to make a quarrel with and fight *honoris causâ*. The other adornments of the room were not very notable. There was a large supply of chairs, all more or less unfit for service, from wounds received "in action." A long homely table, a ragged "dhurree," an old *Army List*, a stale newspaper, and the skull of Haupper's wonderful Scotch terrier "Smicks" (which had polished off two jackals and a jungle-cat in 4 minutes 25 seconds

and died immediately afterwards), complete my inventory of the contents of the room.

They lived very hard, the 99th—that must be confessed; their promotion was the fastest of any regiment at that time; they rushed so recklessly into debt that, with the exception of Surruk and one or two of the married men, not a bank in India would receive their names as principal or security. They had a salamander love for fire-eating; yet, notwithstanding this catalogue of vices, they were a most generous, hospitable set, adepts at every manly sport, and brave as lions.

No regiment fought better than theirs, black though it was, at the battle of F—— and of S——, which swept the majority of those fierce spirits to Hades; indeed, not one of them survived to see the regiment they were so proud of turn to mutiny and murder in '57.

Ochter dined regularly at the mess, though there was nothing very tempting about it: he was the sort of man to prefer dining on bread and water with some good fellows to share it, to faring sumptuously alone. It is the same with most people at his age; but all in time become prudent, selfish,

and food-loving ; and if I must acknowledge a failing of my own, it is the thorough enjoyment of a nice luxurious little dinner, with nobody to share it or to look glum because I have taken all the kidney and not offered him the liver-wing. Noisy, uproarious mess-dinners, where the viands are disregarded, and the fluids swallowed without a thought for bouquet or beeswing, and where the guests never trouble themselves about anything but making each other happy, are my horror. I may have enjoyed them once, indeed I must have, or I could not possibly have so many joyous scenes vividly traced on my memory ; but I could not endure them now.

The 99th dinners consisted almost entirely of mutton ; top, bottom, and sides. Generally a boiled shoulder of mutton, bathed in a thick white repulsive fluid, stood at one end of the table. (From what land of barbarous pre-Adamite darkness was the habit of boiling a shoulder of mutton introduced in India, as if its features were not already bad enough? Certainly not from England or Ireland. The Scotch are, I am aware, in the habit of holding the head of a sheep, unshaven, over a fire, and gnawing it

when the hair or wool is well done; but I have never heard the nation reproached with boiling a shoulder of mutton.) At the other end a roast leg of the same animal. At one side a preparation called with bitter truth an Irony stew; on the other, a dish of Hindostanee mutton cutlets. To do the mess justice, they were once in the habit of eating roast loin; but old Surruk used to become so furious and unbearable in the dispute which occurred every second day as to whether the fat ought to have been removed before the dish was brought to table or not, that the president found himself compelled to interdict the only eatable joint which the gram-fed ovis of India furnishes.

However, few dined with the 99th who could be made unhappy, as steady, sensible people are, by a bad dinner. Ochter took kindly to them all, and became in a short time a close friend of Captain Stapleton, whom it is consequently incumbent upon me to introduce particularly to the reader. The others we may not require to know much more intimately than we do now.

Stapleton, at the time I write of, had been about

thirteen years in the country. He was a scion of a once wealthy and well-known family, the Stapletons of Staple Fells in Lancashire; but as a younger son of a younger son he could obtain from his father nothing beyond a respectable education and a cadetship, the promise of which the old gentleman had obtained by the judicious management of two votes at a disputed election, in which a Chairman of the Court was interested. Very poor himself, with other mouths gaping for food about him in his crazy house amongst the pines which covered the fells in those days, Mr. Stapleton was only too glad to hurry his boy into the world; and forth went the latter, nothing loth, with his direct appointment and an order in his pocket on the house of Neil and Pottah in Calcutta for forty pounds. He had never loved his household gods very ardently; there was too much pinching and struggling with the goddess *Egestas*; and when this cruel deity is paramount the Lares and Penates must be forsaken. There is no such preventive against home-sickness as the knowledge that the home you are banished from, is a poor and unhappy one.

Before Stapleton landed in the country, he had often indulged himself in the delusive process of converting rupees into shillings and pounds; and, calculating his income accordingly, he fondly hoped, that, by economy and management, he might save enough to lighten periodically the load of debt and poverty which hung upon his birthplace at Staple Fells. Young fellows similarly circumstanced may be victimized by the same notions still. When Stapleton discovered, as he soon did, how hopeless his position was, he endeavoured, as clearly as possible, to prove to his father that assistance from him was out of the question, at least for very many years. He failed in convincing him of this, and received by return of mail a violent and angry letter, in which his father declared he wished to hear no more of him or from him. This letter had the worst effect upon the lad: he became the most extravagant man in a very extravagant regiment; and at the time I write of, it was doubtful whether he could even preserve his commission. Tall and thin, with aquiline nose, delicate features, bright hazel eyes, and well-bred

hands and feet, he had that rare physique which is taking with both sexes. His complexion was fair and delicate, and his face was quite free from that coarseness which spoils most men's good looks, and which is acquired in a marvellously short time in the Indian climate: a coarseness ascribed, no doubt with justice, to the bad qualities of the water, the most pernicious liquid, according to the best authorities, that one can become attached to in that thirsty Hindostan. "Too weak to be a sinner," so that simple Shakspeare styles "honest water" somewhere; but universal Indian experience has proved it the reverse. Fevers, liver complaints, dysentery, in fact the whole catalogue of Death's tropical *armamentarium*, have been, and constantly are, ascribed to its malignant qualities; but who could ever trace his illness to the over-dosing himself with nutrient brandy, alterative port, or tonic beer? The water of India has a great deal to answer for, albeit we, enlightened moderns, fully forewarned, use it in the very smallest quantities, and mainly as an external application.

Stapleton then, so bounteously endowed by nature, and not neglecting the assistance of art, as the books

of his Calcutta tailors Suth and Coby could prove if needful, was very much of a lady's man (his biographer does not know exactly what this phrase means), and was welcome everywhere, except by mothers whose daughters were like Horace's Chloe, *tempestivæ sequi viro*. He understood very well the maternal feelings in such cases, and respected them accordingly; like a well-behaved child at table, he never cried for or grasped at the nice things which were not intended for him, but on particular occasions he could not repress a feeling of humiliation. Thus in the case of "old Skew," before his niece Flora joined her, she found Captain Stapleton a very nice young man, and in her opinion not half so bad as story-tellers represented him; but the first time he called after the young lady's advent, Mrs. Skewbald admitted him for the sole purpose of being rude, which required very little effort on her part.

During the visit, notwithstanding the hints and cuts of her female Argus, Io was, contrary to her wont, most affable, and even had the imprudence afterwards to let drop a few words of admiration

of this Captain Stapleton; any feeling, however, which they might represent, was effectually crushed out of the nymph's prudent heart by a choice selection or two from Mrs. Skewbald's *répertoire* of scandal, and Stapleton was branded at once with the *Æ* diphthong, or whatever is the equivalent worst mark at the matrimonial Lloyd's. How different was Mr. Henry Lony Ochter's reception in the same quarter! Mrs. Skewbald actually beamed upon him; "he must come to them as often as he could;" he must enjoy a little society after a hard day's work in Cutcherry; he must be so lonely in that large house all by himself. "We can have a little music too, my niece plays so nicely—all the newest opera airs—and I know you sing with great taste," &c. &c.

Flora seconded her aunt, but after the manner of modest maidens. She knew the work before her, and did not shrink from it; but the task was easy, and never had girl less difficulty in securing the man she was set upon. No Thackeray had laid down as an axiom at that time, "that any woman can attach to herself any man she pleases;" but our Flora knew it intuitively. Personally or men-

tally, Mr. Ochter had nothing peculiarly attractive; he did not come nearly up to her idea of an orthodox lover, but the consciousness of this deficiency did not influence so thoroughly practical a young lady. She wanted a position in society, a good establishment, a carriage, and so forth. It was plainly her policy, then, not to waste time in seeking for one who should combine the last-mentioned essentials and be at the same time worthy of her love—after all a non-essential; but to take Time by the forelock (he becomes bald all over in a sadly short time in India, when young unmarried ladies are concerned), and to engage a man well circumstanced, who gave fair promise of at least not making her unhappy. She might trust to chance for the rest. The love one reads of in books and rarely hears of, is all nonsense, and did not her mother and aunt frequently tell her so! With some such notions of the course she ought to steer, Miss Flora Armit commenced a series of highly sentimental duets with Mr. Henry Lony Ochter over Mrs. Skewbald's ramshackle piano, which the major had picked up at a sale for fifty rupees, and the

shrieks and jinglings of which had not tortured human tympana for years. An ordinary man would have rushed out of the house crying for mercy when the first note was struck, but our poor hero's ears were deaf to everything but the voice of the syren; not that she had any real "music in her soul," but the oft-fought battle of Prague would have sufficed for the subjection of Mr. Ochter's heart. She had little taste, and a hard timbery voice, which her music-master assured her had contralto powers quite equal to the Grisi of the day. The writer is no musical connoisseur, he is impious enough to think the treble singing of the boy-choristers in a cathedral anthem more soul-moving than the finest stage or concert room soprano, and his opinion is therefore worthless; but he must declare his antipathy to domestic contralto: like the violin, it is a punishment to hear it except in the highest perfection, and his readers would agree with him, if they ever heard, as he has, young Mrs. Ochter's sepulchral notes booming aloft, and exasperating the whole congregation in the little church at Paharnauth.

Shortly before Flora arrived at Chillumpore, Lony Ochter, sadly musing over his solitary cheroot, had come to the conclusion that he ought to marry as soon as possible, and had resolved to do it. He could not exist without a companion, and what security had he against being ordered any day to a much less inhabited and much more wretched station than Chillumpore. He was entirely his own master—had a good salary (when all those Meehurbancee Bank instalments were paid off), and he could see no just cause or impediment, except that he knew of no pretty girl just then available: “for my wife must be pretty, hang it!” The reader will forgive this last expletive on Mr. Ochter’s part, but it probably arose from the remembrance of the criticisms he and his friends were perpetually uttering upon such men’s wives as were not pretty, and he did not wish the same to happen in his own case. Lony Ochter, though not over worldly wise, had some discernment, and was fortunate enough to know himself to be a good catch; yet he had no idea of marrying and being married except on the good old mutual love and admiration principles. No man, unless a mere for-

tune-hunter, like the mythical Irishman at a watering-place in the old novels and plays, would dream of proposing to a girl because he respected her; but the latter, who may be a little of a fortune-hunter now and then, will often accept a husband without once stopping to analyze her own feelings towards him. This may suit very well in France, where marriages are made a mutual convenience; but in England and India this plan occasionally causes very awkward mistakes.

Lony Ochter knew that if he were to propose to the most eligible young lady in the presidency, her parents or guardians would ask no troublesome questions; the rugged trissyllable, "Settlement," against which so many loving hearts are broken in the mother-country, would never be spoken in his presence: no anxious father would write to some mutual friend for a "confidential report" as to his habits and manners; the mystic letters C. S. equal in potency the "Sesame" of the Forty Thieves. Unless some C. S. like himself had already obtained the solemn promise, he would be as morally certain of not being rejected as the Sultan when he

throws his cambric handkerchief to one of a bevy of Houris. He was in this happy state of mind when, one morning during his ride, he saw Major Skewbald drive past, with the prettiest girl sitting beside him he had seen since he left home.

He turned back enraptured with the fair vision ; and even Flora herself, on hearing his name and position from the major, who was bringing her over the last couple of stages in a buggy, was struck by the fact that the first stranger she encountered on entering Chillumpore was the very man on whose account her journey had been undertaken. Ochter returned to his lonely bungalow, thinking of all the novels he had ever read founded upon "love at first sight."

Sitting down to breakfast, he found himself supposing the opposite chair and covers (which the table servant of Hindostan will persist in setting out duly in a bachelor establishment, though the nearest Englishman may be a hundred miles off) occupied by a golden-haired creature with peach-bloom cheeks. At Cutcherry, when gazing solemnly in vacuo, as if listening with all attention to the flow of

euphonious "court" language from the betel-stained lips of one of his Omlah, "all caviare to him as yet," the bright face shone before him. By evening he was a lost man. Hurrying away early from office, he made himself up with unusual care, and went forth upon the Mall to behold the dazzler again.

Next day he called at the major's, was admitted and introduced in due form. The female Skewbald saw at a glance that the required effect had been already produced; but not before Flora had made the same discovery. They said little upon the subject after he had left, but Flora soon settled in her mind that she could not be very far wrong in giving the gentleman any little encouragement he required—"though not handsome, he is passable enough, and he has a very good-natured expression. I should not have much difficulty in managing him. What's his pay, I wonder? I hope he is not much in debt! all young civilians are, they tell me; though I don't know why they should be if they have such good salaries." Little inward conversations of this sort had Miss Armit with herself, while her aunt, whose views were even more practical, spoke of his

prospects, his first-rate interest, his capital retiring pension, and even of the fine provision made by their funds for civilians' widows. I can safely aver that from the first to the last of Lony Ochter's wooing, not a word of love language was uttered by either.

The finely rounded sentences, the delicately spiced compliments, the vows of constancy and adoration, the eloquent rhapsodies in which the lover declares himself, and with which the pages of love-stories are laden, are a delusion and a mockery. No man, let him be ever so moon-stricken, can express himself in any but the simplest words on the momentous occasion of his proposing. Neither do young ladies bury their faces in their hands, or burst into tears, or do anything else ridiculous; they decline or accept with an ordinary "I am very sorry," or "Please ask papa," and there's an end on't. Who goes on his knees now-a-days to soften an obdurate maiden? Who, when refused, begs permission to kiss the rejecting one's hand, and this favour vouchsafed, condemns himself to bachelor sack-cloth and ashes for the rest of his days? If the

days of stained glass and chivalry are gone, so are those of Quixotic lovers and transcendental Dulcineas; and really the world gets on very well without them.

In these modern days broken hearts can be as cleverly cemented as broken china, and the man who invests in the damaged article very often leads a long and contented life without discovering the flaw. No person of sense accepts as a reason for never trying again the fact of his having been once rejected, though he may have felt desperate and very much in an "anywhere out of the world" condition for a day or two. According to the older novelists, no such terrible misfortune could befall one as to be "crossed in love;" any other calamity might be got over but this. In our degenerate days the pang it produces is in the majority of instances about equal to that occasioned by missing a train, or losing a purse with half a sovereign in it. I do not pen these wholesome reflections to prepare my readers for a pathetic rejection scene; nothing of the sort, I can assure them. Many who saw her and who had the felicity of speaking to her, would have eagerly entered for

the race; but the pre-arrangement for Flora was, as the conversation in the Buffadar mess has shown, perfectly well understood; so the course being closed, Mr. Ochter's true love ran smoothly enough. He had one, possibly two, *tête-à-tête* conversations with the young lady before he crossed the Rubicon. On both occasions she talked with so much interest about his plans, asked him so many particulars about his horses (for he loved these next after himself and Flora), sympathized with him so warmly when he alluded to his hard work and Cutcherry troubles, expressed such strong desire to know his mother and sisters, that poor Lony Ochter could not sleep for twelve hours afterwards. No such certain snare, young ladies, for unsuspecting man, as talking to him about himself; the principle is the same as that upon which the Rocky Mountain hunters bait their beaver traps; but in both, the thing must be so delicately done as to leave no trace of the setter.

Mr. Ochter ceased to frequent the Buffadar mess, where he was once so constant an attendant; but this caused no surprise: a commiserating shake of the

head whenever his name was mentioned, a remark expressive of sorrowful pity, or the question, "Has any one heard when it is to come off?" spoken in a lugubrious tone, as if with reference to a funeral, denoted the amount of compassion felt for him. There was no hostility, such as would have been expressed if he had cut his friends for any trivial cause. He lost his jovial look, too; but love, ecstatic and Elysian though it be, certainly does sadden and depress even the liveliest. This mental phenomenon deserves a little investigation. Is it because of the law, that complete happiness shall not be on this side of the Styx? or, is it because the loving one is continually haunted by the dread, however causeless, of losing the loved one before he has made her his own for ever? One peculiarity about it is, that, like whooping-cough, it never seizes a man a second time, and always attacks the young. Watch the love-making of a bachelor well over thirty: does it resemble in the least the spasmodic throes of his juniors by ten or twelve years. No! it is easy, placid, and business-like. Compare again a widower's wooing. Does that experienced man write sonnets

to his mistress's eyebrow? No: he goes to Doctors' Commons, and pays a shilling for the right of search into will arrangements.

Lony Ochter, then, felt uncomfortable, more so than he ever had been before, even during his interview with the manager of the Meehurbanee Bank, and this, though he had no reason to apprehend a refusal. Yet, what could he do? He was desperately in love, though barely three weeks had elapsed since he first saw Flora. He could not help thinking it ridiculous that he should propose marriage after so short and slight an acquaintance, yet he felt he never could love her more dearly.

To do Flora justice, she had not found it necessary to alter the favorable opinion of him she had first formed. She was quite prepared to accept him at any moment, or to cut him calmly, should the Fates send some wealthier man in time. Her sleep and appetite were not in the least interfered with, her fair brow was as smooth, her smile as sweet as ever.

Mrs. Skewbald, having a little womanly pity in her, made an attempt to sound her niece, in the

mistaken notion that she may have discouraged Mr. Ochter—he looked so downcast; but Flora “shut her up” at once, and, by way of punishment, talked to Captain Stapleton for a whole half-hour that evening at the gardens. Mrs. Skewbald was as meek as a lamb for ever after, dreading a repetition of this perverse conduct; but Flora was only playing her fish, while the older but less skilled lady, thought she was pulling at the line with all her might, or even trying to break it. Flora considered that Mr. Ochter required some stimulus; her visit to her aunt was becoming over-long, and the good old colonel impatient for her return. The only one left to him out of a large family, no one but a father could say how he rejoiced in her—she was all in all to him. Her mother’s feeling was different; she would have preferred seeing her wedded to some suitable husband, to watching her English colour fade, and her beauty lessen, as they quickly would in that stupid house. Colonel Armit never dreamt that she must be married and taken away from him directly, to be seen rarely afterwards. If it must happen, he would willingly entrust her to Howard, of his own regiment,

who had been his adjutant and prime favourite for many years, now a captain, and one of those profoundly smitten by Flora ; of course, he, the colonel, did not hear a word of the doings at Chillumpore.

Ochter was made quite as miserable as Flora desired, by her smiles freely bestowed on poor Stapleton, who valued them at a much lower standard than she would have been quite pleased to know. I don't think she would have pained Ochter so much if she knew exactly why he was hanging fire ; she was rather at a loss about it ; but it never occurred to her to think their short acquaintance any obstacle to their immediate engagement. However, her mild flirtation with Captain Stapleton on this particular evening brought about the required result, though not in the way she anticipated. Mrs. Kookrie, the adjutant's wife, whose name has been mentioned before, watched the whole proceeding with the eager interest our weaker and better halves take in such matters. She was not on speaking or visiting terms with the major's wife, the reasons for which may appear hereafter ; but she knew quite as well as Mrs. Skewbald herself the main events of the latter's

household. Mrs. Kookrie liked Mr. Ochter; in his ignorance of Indian ways, his heartiness with everybody, his willingness to oblige all, she saw much to admire, and she was grieved for him, when she found herself forced to conclude that Flora was playing "off and on" with him, with, perhaps, the intention of jilting him in the end. She did not see through Flora's tactics, nor did she for a moment guess that Flora would have freely given one of her shell-like ears rather than lose Mr. Ochter. In her pity for Mr. Ochter, the warm-hearted though slightly mischief-making Mrs. Kookrie thought that her best plan would be to reveal all she knew and feared to his mother, whom she formerly knew and with whom she occasionally exchanged a note still. She could not tell her anything, directly, but she might at all events put her upon her guard, as it was just possible her son might not have communicated with her. Young people, thought Mrs. Kookrie (herself an old married party of three-and-twenty), often have a feeling of shame about telling their love affairs to mothers and sisters.

"I am sure it is my duty to write to my friend

Mrs. Ochter. She would never forgive me if anything were to happen, and I am sure I never saw any one so changed, in so short a time, as Mr. Ochter."

Mrs. Kookrie did not deem it expedient to consult her lord and master, Lieutenant and Adjutant and Quartermaster Kookrie, of the 99th Buffadars, on this point. A gruff recommendation to mind her own business, and a fresh supply of returns to copy, would have been all the assistance she could expect from him. Next morning, then, after auditing her khansaman's accounts—which task comprises about the whole of "woman's work" in India—Mrs. Kookrie sat down to carry out her benevolent intent; and a studied missive, which my readers must be spared, was written and addressed to Mrs. Ochter, Beauclerc Cottage, Paharnauth. The effect it produced will be considered in due time and place.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUCLERC COTTAGE AND ITS INMATES.

"Quæ loca fabulosus
Lambit Hydaspes."

HORACE.

PAHARNAUTH could boast of no prettier or more happily situated residence than that occupied by the widow and three daughters of the late Colonel Ochter of the Bengal Blues. In the midst of a forest of rhododendrons, which mantled over a spur from one of the main ranges of hills, and on the most precipitous side of the spur itself, a shelf-like space had been found perfectly level, behind and above which solid granite rock sloped gradually upwards, as if it had been scarped by some Titan hand. By what process of nature this convenient nook had been scooped out, the writer acknowledges himself unable to explain; and the difficulty did not, he

dares say, impede good old Colonel Ochter when he selected the site. There was just room enough for the house, out-offices, and gardens, and a cunningly contrived path, which brought some new beauty to the view at every turn, connected the place with the main road to the station, which wound along the side of the hill at a short distance below. The house was of that most delightful of all architectural styles, modern English; and being two-storied, was rather degraded by the title "Beaulcerc Cottage." But then in the Hills every tenement is a "castle" or a "cottage," and the proprietor, who was not proud, selected the more modest designation.

The darling object of the builder had been to make it as home-like as possible; and he had succeeded very well. The verandah was of light iron-work, and included both stories, the windows of each floor opening upon it. In it were ranged pots, containing choice camellias, pelargoniums, some delicate kinds of fuchsias, and numberless other flowering plants, which were not hardy enough to live through the severity of a Hill winter in the open air. The garden, immediately in front of the house, was a

perfect gem. In its centre, a pretty fountain played without intermission, except when frost-bound ; its basin was tenanted in the summer months by gold and silver fish, which were, however, removed and carefully nursed through the winter. The walks were smoothly gravelled, and were bordered by the red straight stalks of "London pride." The snow-drop, the lily of the valley, primulas without end, stocks, chrysanthemums, dahlias, irises, the blue gentianella, hyacinths, and tulips, managed to bloom here. There were beds of carnation and pink, beds of pansies of the most beautiful tints, a rosary, containing the moss rose, the damask, the white, with its delicate pink centre, the homely dog, and hundred-leaved roses, the union, and the yellow Scotch rose. A wire fence ran round the whole, over which genuine English ivy was trained, and in the corners stood most cherished trees ; two hawthorns, a purple and white lilac, and two of variegated holly.

A glance at this paradise proved clearly that no Indian mallee had the management of it. There was a lady touch and a lady taste perceptible everywhere. Outside the garden a belt of emerald turf, intervening

between the fence and the edge of the plateau, was studded with some young English trees, all thriving: a weeping ash, the whip-like branches of which curved to the earth as gracefully as they do at home; one or two well grown lindens, a fine arbutus, and a copperbeech, whose ruddy leaves contrasted strangely with the bright green of the other trees. I should not omit to mention the arbour of tasteful shell-work, with its dwarf cupola, from the centre of which was suspended a cage containing a lark, born far away in the fragrant meadows of Devon; stolen early, by a small white hand, from its mother's nest. It had never known itself a captive or an exile; and now to hear its joyous melody, and to see it, as it sang, beating the turf in the cage with its wings, as if fancying itself rising at every note to its "watch-tower in the skies," was as great a treat to many fatherless exiles, as that the well-known lark in Australia afforded to the wild gold-hunters, whom no human voice could soften.

The view from the garden of Beauclerc Cottage was the loveliest possible. In front the eye ran down over tiers of oak, wild fruit-trees, and needle-leaved

pinet, to a fertile valley, at one season yellow with golden corn, at another an expanse of green rice fields, sprinkled here and there with clumps of musa, and the graceful tree bamboo, which hid from the passers-by the brown eaves of the village nestled among them. Beyond were low, sterile ridges, which seemed to shut in this golden vale from the outer world; and [farther away, still the eye reached the boundless plains, where nothing was distinguishable but the glistening coils of more than one great river. On the right of the house, piled one on another, were the mountains, clad in gradation from base to summit with scrub of wild indigo and acacia, forests of ilex and rhododendron, then patches of brown vegetation, then, clinging to the summits, dusky groves of conifers; beyond these were higher ranges still, whose rounded tops were bare. Of the latter, one had been riven by some convulsion of Nature, and through the cleft—noblest sight of all—a solitary peak, white with never-melting snow, was seen tapering into the blue heaven like the marble spire of some vast cathedral. This majestic spectacle was the more prized, and the possessors of it the more

envied, as it was the only glimpse of the great glory of the Himalaya, the Snowy Range, obtainable in any perfection at Paharnauth.

The houses were so perched upon the sides of the hills, that their beauties were quite hidden from the inhabitants, who would seem to have thought of nothing but mere altitude when selecting sites.

The view from Beauclerc Cottage to the left was more circumscribed, but still finer. It was a broad hill-side, covered with rhododendron, which became a sheet of crimson at the flowering season. About its centre were some bare rocks, amid which gleamed, in the dry weather, what appeared a tiny silver thread, but in the rains a noisy, foaming cascade, half hidden by fern. White houses were scattered over this hill, and the gothic window of the station church looked out with pleasing effect from the foliage in which the rest of the building was concealed.

Having learnt so much of the outside, the reader may desire a glance within the house. His patience might not endure my describing it accurately: how there was a large entrance hall, with spacious draw-

ing-room opening into it on one side, and on the other two less extensive rooms bearing the orthodox titles of dining and breakfast parlour, and still more wonderful, known as such to the servants, who were subject to heavy penalties if they attempted to shirk the names.

Here one saw no barbarous doors, three-quarters window, and fastenable only on one side by an iron bolt, such as prevail in the most palatial residences in the plains. No hideous bare white or yellow walls, ornamented only with patches of white-ant work, no rustling "chuts" of white-washed calico, giving shelter to rats and lizards, no irregular clay floors covered with convict-woven rug, or dhuree of prison pattern, which gives one an eye-ache to look at. Can I speak—without making the suffering plain-dweller weep,—of French windows with mahogany framing, of silk blinds, of moulded shutters, of gilt cornices with purple damask hanging, of the well-selected papers on the walls, of the velvet-pile carpets upon the floors, of ormolu clocks, of circular mirrors, of the genuine Claude, and of that bold sketch of

Turner's, with which the rooms of Beauclerc Cottage were adorned? It was, in a word, a perfect house; and if Mrs. Ochter and her three daughters, Esther, Louisa, and Gertrude, were not placed beyond the reach of discomfort there, human efforts are not to blame.

About three o'clock in the afternoon of a sunny day in March, Mrs. Ochter, laid on a sofa in one parlour, was sleeping the after-tiffin sleep of the just. Let us gaze for a moment on her recumbent form and rosy face, from which, sadly out of keeping, however, a middle-aged native female, plump as her mistress, but ever so much more wrinkled, is warding off curious flies. Mrs. Ochter must have been handsome once, for her features are still good: but whether from high living or want of exercise, she looks rather apoplectic now, and so cannot disguise from our ears the horrible fact that she snores rather loudly. Her neatly laced cap has slipped off too, and reveals a white spot large as a five-shilling piece, which no mortal eye except her ayah's ever gazed upon, where hair ought to have been;—but it is not fair to inspect too closely,

without due warning, the good madam whom it would be flattery to call middle-aged.

Her daughters are together in the next room, far from being sleepy; indeed, they are as noisy as young birds in a nest, and a great deal pleasanter to look at. The three girls have not been long in India. Though born in the country, they were forwarded very young, one after the other, to Mrs. Ochter's sister, Miss Sleigh, who lived in a moss-grown cottage in one of the prettiest and most retired hamlets in Devonshire. Miss Sleigh was a most amiable little woman, on whom spinsterism had been forced by circumstances.

Shortly after Colonel Ochter had sent for her sister from India (he had engaged himself to her in his cadet days), Miss Sleigh's mother, who had only a small pension, died, leaving her daughter almost destitute. Mrs. Ochter, of course, begged of her to come to India; but this did not suit Miss Sleigh, who had an independent turn of mind, and had, before her sister's invitation reached her, obtained an engagement as governess in a wealthy family. She remained with it for many years, until,

in fact, the only daughter, her charge, had passed from the short dress and trousers epoch of her existence, to the orange-wreath and lace-veil stage; when she retired from her post, with a well-earned pension, and the use of Long Orchard Cottage rent-free for life. Mrs. Ochter very naturally selected her sister's house as her daughters' English home, and Miss Sleigh herself as their instructress.

The convenience was mutual, for no one could excel Miss Sleigh in the attention she bestowed upon the three girls. They grew up in health, beauty, and, better than both, innocence; they never entered a school, had associated little with girls of their own age; and so their ideas upon things in general differed somewhat from those of our friend Flora Armit. Indeed, Mrs. and the Misses Basan-glais, at whose academy Flora had been brought up, would have been shocked at the way the education of the Ochter girls was conducted. They never had the benefit of "a master" in any one accomplishment. Their French was good honest "English French," quite as useful to them in after life as the most elaborate Parisian music they all

had an exquisite ear for—nearly as good as Miss Sleigh's own; and with the aid of the school-room piano and harp, bequeathed to her by her married pupil when her existence as school-girl ended, Miss Sleigh made such performers of her nieces as were not to be found at Mrs. Basanglais'. Drawing Miss Sleigh did not aspire to teach, but she would have had the Misses Ochter taught if they showed any special taste for it.

She did not consider it a necessary of life, like music. Italian, German and elocution the girls never heard of. They could read, write, and speak English correctly, and so much cannot be said of girls educated in seven-eighths of the institutions and academies of the present day. They were most expert with the needle. They could "turn the heel" of a stocking, which is, I am given to understand, a most difficult operation; and they were most skilful at a mysterious process called "darning," with the nature of which the writer is not acquainted. He asked a highly accomplished young lady the other day to tell him what the above strange terms might mean; and to his ex-

treme dismay, she looked as indignant as if he had asked her whether she preferred "Dutch Cut" or "Cavendish." Convinced, then, that "turning the heel" and "darning" must signify something wrong, or extremely vulgar, I would not have alluded to the Misses Ochter's acquaintance therewith, if it were not particularly mentioned in the memoranda upon which this story is founded. They were all mighty in the "wools" department, as Miss Linwood would have certified, if their "samplers" had been submitted to that amazon of the needle.

"I wish 'twas time to go out," said Gertrude, the youngest,—a bright, black-eyed, brown-haired, somewhat freckled girl of sixteen, as she "flattened her nose" against the window-pane; "that horrid black man will destroy my violets,—I know he will. Do look at him, Loo, squatting in the very middle of the bed, too. I wish mamma would send him away altogether!"

"And give you charge of the vegetable and fruit garden in place of him. We should be well off then, Miss Gerty!"

"Indeed we should, Loo. Couldn't I write to aunt Kitty to send us out Bob, and some rakes, with a spade and wheel-barrow. I am sure we should do better than that Molly, as mamma calls him. I must tell aunt Kitty, too, to tell cook what a nice namesake of hers we have got. Oh! I wish the sun would get behind the hill quicker. I am certain it would not harm me in the least; mamma needn't be so particular. I have got freckles enough already. I don't see room for any more. I wonder is mamma awake yet?"

"Dear me, Gerty, how you do rattle on. Loo wants to read, and I am trying to write a letter if you will let me. You have only practised for half an hour to-day, you know. What would aunt Kitty say if she heard it?"

"I abominate pianos," said Gertrude, with an affected air, in reply to this appeal of Esther, the senior of the three; going, however, at the same time to the instrument, upon which, having just rushed up and down her "scales" several times much more loudly than necessary, so as to prove to her sisters she could bore them much more effectually with her

fingers than her tongue if she liked, she began to go through her stock-working piece, the overture to Don Giovanni,—Esther occasionally interrupting with corrective remarks, which she uttered with matronly gravity to the youngest sister.

Esther, nearly nineteen, was a fair sight to look upon; she had one of those faces in which the expression alone was so charming as to please everybody; even critics of her own sex and age were influenced by it,—not but that they pronounced her beauty rather marred than otherwise by the contrast between the wavy tresses of her genuine golden hair and her large brown eyes, which told of nothing but sensibility and kindness. Her skin was exquisitely fair and delicately tinted; her mouth was universally pronounced too large for beauty, but her perfect teeth and sweet smile fully compensated for this defect. Louisa nobody called pretty. She had a well-shaped head and good figure, but her features were commonplace: no one ever thought of admiring her, even to her mother.

“She is very amiable,” said the ladies, which means, as is well known, very plain; the poor girl

was not even amiable. She had a great deal of that rare quality, common sense, and she had discovered early in life, without being told, that her eyes were small and of a greenish grey colour; that her hair was coarse, her nose too large and badly shaped; a young sensitive girl could make no more unhappy discovery than this. It would have been much better for her own sake if she could have fancied herself a Helen. Burns, in one of his poems, wishes that we had the power of "seeing ourselves as others see us." Happy we should be indeed if we had! If every one were to know exactly what his neighbour thought of his endowments, physical or moral, how pleasant society would be! Most young girls, however carefully brought up, know early, perhaps intuitively, that they must be pretty, or nobody will endure them.

It must be under the influence of this notion that the plainest of her sex is never found to acknowledge herself to be such, or to forswear such adjuvants as dress, jewellery, &c., which, though they may assist beauty, do not certainly redeem ugliness. Louisa Ochter, I repeat, would have been happier, and

would have made others happier, if, like other girls, she believed herself beautiful. But she sternly condemned herself. I do not mean that she did not take the same pleasure in dress as her sisters; nothing would have made her a slattern: but she had decided that she was below acceptance by anybody, and that it was her duty throughout life to be wretched. A constant giving way to morbid feelings of this kind, had soured her temper and saddened her expression: she could make nobody a confidant in a matter which she thought beyond the reach of sympathy; and many were the long and searching cross-examinations which Esther had to undergo on her account, from their mother, as to what might have occurred in England to make Louisa so different from other girls.

Esther could tell her nothing. She had for many years noticed this strangeness about Louisa; and she had often heard aunt Kitty talk rather harshly to her about it. Esther thought she had become even more melancholy than usual since their arrival in India, but this was probably from want of occupation. Louisa had done a great deal in the village near

Long Orchard Cottage; she went about visiting the sick, and teaching in the Sunday schools. She might feel the privation of such work now.

This sketch will give the reader some idea of Louisa Ochter. As for Gertrude, she promised to be very pretty, but not in Esther's style: a petite brunette, lively, kind-hearted and anxious to please; but at the same time capricious, rather vain, and somewhat warm in temper. Miss Gerty, though over sixteen, required some careful training still; and Esther bestowed upon her as much as she thought she could bear without rebelling. Gertrude had a profound opinion of her sister's musical skill, and therefore bore her lectures thereon with more patience than she tolerated them when on any other subject. When Esther had finished her letter, she walked to the window and stood looking at the valley yellow in the evening sun.

Louisa looked up from her book, and said abruptly,—

“Do you miss the sea much, Esther?”

“Strange! I was just thinking how faultless this beautiful scenery would be, if we only had a glimpse of it.”

"For my part, I love the sea more than any land scenery. What wouldn't I give to be back at Long Orchard again!" said Louisa, despondingly. "I am tired of Paharnauth already."

"You should not allow yourself to fancy so, Loo! How grieved poor mamma would be, who is so attached to this place, and you know she is always impressing upon us that India is, properly speaking, our home, not Devonshire."

"It will be hard for me to think so. I am often tempted to write to aunt Kitty, to beg of her to ask mamma to let me go back again."

"This is nonsense, dear Loo," said Esther, kindly; "even if the expense were nothing, what would mamma feel? Surely she has more claims upon us than aunt Kitty."

"Oh, of course, Esther; I did not mean that: but look at the life one leads here; and mind, this is the cream of Indian life,—reading novels all day, and riding a shaggy pony up and down the same hill every evening."

"The Sunday schools and old widow Steenie's everlasting ills and aches again, Miss Loo," said

her sister. "Well, I don't see how you are to find substitutes for those, unless you marry a missionary; and that is rather a poor spec—so the authorities say."

"Dear Esther! you know I can't endure your talking in this way, even in joke; and you know very well," said poor Louisa, bitterly, "that I am not likely to be troubled with many offers, even in India, where wives are scarce." Esther had given up, long before, the attempt to induce Louisa not to depreciate herself in this cynical fashion,—so she allowed it to pass. "However," continued Louisa, "I think we have both done a very foolish thing."

"What is it?"

"Making a promise to mamma not to marry without her consent; I have thought a great deal about it, and I do not believe she had any right to obtain it from us."

"Oh, hush, Loo! Gerty will hear you. Mamma did it for the best; and for my part, I cannot fancy myself marrying anybody she did not approve of. Do you think you could?"

"If I could fancy myself likely to be married by

anybody, it is quite as probable as not, that I might prefer a person whom mamma might dislike; and I think the same possible about you, Esther. Now suppose two gentlemen, one ugly, stupid, and rich, the other good-looking, clever, and poor, both paying you attention, which would mamma prefer?"

"Let us not talk about it,—that is the best way, dear!" said Esther, conscious of impending defeat. "Why do you fret yourself with things that never can happen! Come, Gerty; it is time to go into the garden at last. Where can she be gone to?" said Esther, looking round the room. "Out already, I declare!"

Out, indeed, Gertrude was, and engaged in scolding the mallee for having attempted to trespass upon her particular parterre without permission. Bred up in a rustic district, Gertrude, though sixteen, was quite a child in mind. . City girls become young women much sooner than country ones, and a city girl of sixteen would have been shocked at Gertrude's mode of life. She had a contempt for complexions in general, and her own in particular, and it was only by the strictest surveillance, her mother said,

that she could preserve any trace of her original fair skin. Hands and nails she looked upon as gardening implements, and used to come in with both in such a state as to drive mamma desperate.

"I really don't think I ought to bring her out this season; she is a great deal too wild; yet I think she will marry as well as her sisters, if not better. It would be a great comfort to me if they were all married and off my hands, though I am afraid Loo will charm nobody. True, she makes no effort to please; there must be some secret about her, though I do not think Kitty would keep me in the dark if she knew it. I wish Henry would take a little more interest in his sisters; he sometimes forgets to send them his love in his hurried letters to me, and he has not seen them for years. He hurt poor Loo very much by the way he pooh-pooh'd her idea of going to keep his house for him. He was right, of course; but he should have answered her more kindly. I hope he will keep his promise of coming up here this hot weather. It would be so pleasant for the girls."

The extent of Mrs. Ochter's worldly cares will be

gathered from the above ruminations of hers. Under the influence of the definition of a grown-up daughter which all mothers accept, viz. a "thing to be well married," her thoughts about her girls rarely strayed far beyond this. Her son Henry she troubled herself less about. He had never, though dutiful enough, paid much attention to her suggestions upon any subject. She certainly had done her duty so far by the girls. For many weary years of Indian life, beyond Miss Sleigh's letters, and little enclosures of theirs, in which she could trace their progress from children to grown-up girls by the gradual change from the short sentences and "round-hand" of early years to the more finished periods and straight fine strokes of penwomanship, she knew absolutely nothing of them.

How many a mother's heart must have ached and longed in vain, in those days, when England was five months off! Parents have this bitter separation to bear still, but how much has it been alleviated by the efforts of one man, whose memory has no place in India! The majority of those who hurry, as a matter of course, over the route, to the planning of

which he devoted his life, do not even know the name, to say nothing of the labours of Waghorn !

When Colonel Ochter's death occurred, as has been mentioned early in my story, Mrs. Ochter went to England to fetch her daughters and return. She must remain in India, for the property was there from which, in addition to her pension, she obtained a very respectable income. She so managed the journey that they should reach Paharnauth before the end of the cold season, without being previously exposed to a temperature higher than that of the English summer, at least on land. The heat on the Line, and in the Tropics, on the voyage out, could do them no harm. No accident had occurred, and they reached Paharnauth shortly before the reader was introduced to them, with none of their bloom rubbed off, and with every prospect of being the belles of the season.

Fondly does Mrs. Ochter gaze upon her daughters, as, after her siesta, she moves slowly to the garden, while Jock, Gertrude's shaggy terrier, is bounding before her. Pity it is that she should think more of finding some eligible partners to take them off her

hands, than of enjoying the comfort of their society now! She had (and she considered it prudent according to her views) obtained from the three, in the first delight of their being with her again, a promise to marry nobody without her approval; and this she considered tantamount to a promise to marry anybody she should recommend. Sad mistake that, Mrs. Ochter! and you will find it out some day to your cost, and so will one of the graceful figures before you.

"Oh, Master Jock, where have you been? Down sir! Indeed, indeed, you must be tied up," cried Gerty to her pet, who had rushed up to his mistress, oblivious of horticultural considerations, and had floundered through the flower-beds in a reckless manner. "Was he with you, mamma?"

"Yes, darling; under the sofa, I believe. Shall we go out, Esther? Better order the jompan and ponies, and get on your habits quickly. I slept longer than usual to-day, and it is rather late."

"You do not mind my staying at home, mamma?" said Louisa. "I prefer walking about the garden. I am tired of the Mall."

"Not a soul to be seen there either, except ourselves," put in Gertrude.

"Jock wants a walk, or I should stay with Loo."

"Very well, Esther ; you can come with me, and so, I dare say, will Jock if I ask him. But Loo, dear, when the season here commences, it will never do to mope at home. People won't understand it, and you will be talked about as an oddity."

Louisa, who was in better spirits than usual, did not reply, "I don't care what people think," or "If I am an oddity, it cannot be helped," as was her wont when appealed to in this way. She only replied, with a little justifiable hypocrisy, "Of course not, mamma."

"There have been some arrivals already," said Mrs. Ochter ; "one, a very old friend of mine and poor papa's. He has brought up a sick son ; this accounts for his coming up so early."

"What's his name ?" asked Esther.

"Colonel Budlee, of the Blues ; the same branch of the service as poor papa. He is only a brevet-colonel, and a major in his regiment."

This last piece of information was rather thrown away upon her daughters. What "brevet" meant none of them knew, nor would they interrupt their mother to ask.

"Has Mrs. Budlee come with him?"

"Dear, no! She has been dead for years. I believe she died in her confinement of this very son now here. I expect him to call upon me very soon, as we are such very old friends. He knew you, Esther, in your long clothes."

"He must be rather a venerable personage," returned that young lady, not at all impressed by that fact of the long clothes.

"He would not be at all obliged for such a compliment, my dear. I assure you he believes himself quite juvenile still, and is so in mind. But here comes the jompan; do be quick, Esther!"

"What are you going to do, Gerty?" said Louisa.

"Well, I think I had better go out too. I wanted to make a hot cake for tea, but mamma will not hear of it. I want to know, if aunt Kitty allowed me to learn how from books, what's the harm of my making one?"

“Don’t be so silly, Gerty! Everything is different out here, and much that you might do safely at home—I mean at aunt Kitty’s—you must never think of out here; you really should not be so childish.”

Louisa knew that Gertrude was ready to argue the point, and retreated to her own room hastily, to avoid further discussion. Her mother and sisters went out, and she, drawing her chair to the window, sat watching the red sunset light clinging to the top of the hill after all had become sombre below, though not heeding it much. She might have extracted a little moral lesson from the spectacle, peculiarly useful to one of her gloomy cast of thought; but another scene far different, laid many thousand miles off, danced before her eyes until they filled with tears. What was Paharnauth, and its snow-peaks, and its beautiful scenery, to her? She would have given all up for a corner of widow Steenie’s poor hut near Long Orchard.

“At home”—she always thought of her aunt’s house as home—“she might do some good; she had some chance of making herself useful in teaching little children, and helping them. Here she was only a

burden and a trouble to everybody. "If I were pretty, mamma might love me; but nobody can care for me now."

Such were poor Louisa's lamentations, half spoken, half sobbed, as she sat in the twilight; and to such would she give way whenever she had a chance of not being noticed. Her natural despondence had lately been aggravated by intense home-sickness,—a malady which, happily for them, is rather rare among women. Whether it is that the female disposition is more hopeful and more prone to look on the sunny side of things, or whether it is that they are very seldom separated from *all* they hold dear, as men constantly are, I have not often heard of that intense pining after home on the part of women which often depresses and unhinges young men for a long time, in India especially. However, poor Louisa unwittingly suffered from this, in addition to her other griefs. A "good cry" always relieved her; and in this she indulged until she heard the voices of the jompan-bearers, and Gertrude's happy laugh, warning her of her mother's and sisters' return.

CHAPTER V.

VISITORS AT BEAUCLERC COTTAGE.

PAHARNAUTH was in that state of stillness and desolation which precedes the irruption of fugitives from the plains,—the month being March, when all Hill stations are loveliest. Very few people, except constant residents, know how beautiful spring is in the Hills; it is their most charming season. As in North America, the change from winter to genial weather appears to take place in a day. The rhododendrons burst into crimson bloom simultaneously; the young bright green leaves of the oak unfold to the sun; the wild fruit-trees towards the base of the hills rival with their pink and white blossom the orchards of Herefordshire; that “harbinger of spring,” the cuckoo, sends forth his joyous notes at every turn; while the air has all the

balminess of "leafy June" in England. To any one who has enjoyed the mountain spring of India, the Hills are commonplace for the rest of the year; on such a rare occasion as a dry day during the rains, it is certainly pleasant to see the oaks from root to top "plumed with fern;" which is the only redeeming feature of the execrable wet weather in the Hills, and can but seldom be enjoyed.

Mrs. Ochter was an "all the year round" resident; so were one or two house-agents, a dozen invalid and retired officers, a couple of doctors, who shared the anxieties of the house-agents as to whether the season would be good or bad; and two reduced ladies who kept opposition schools, and starved therein. All looked forward eagerly to April. There were now signs of returning animation. Masons and other workmen were furnishing up Messrs. Paynch and Tofa's establishment, which was to "open out" on the 15th. Monsieur L'Oie, the French confectioner, was expected immediately. The Clive Hotel was being whitewashed, and the Kilta Club-house doors had been seen open by old General Goor, who watched it very anxiously, as he had the

privilege of supplying its members with milk, butter, and vegetables, and turning, poor old man! many an honest penny thereby. True, he used to be called General Green-grocer, and impudent young fellows used to shout at him, "How do, old sky-blue?" and "Leh Dudh," after the fashion of female camp-followers, as he passed the Club windows; but he bore it patiently, as he was very poor, with many mouths to feed. He was obliged to grudge himself clothes even, and it was painful to see him toddling about in the morning with his five scraggy daughters, he leading the way dressed in an old pair of gold-laced trousers, a weather-stained "puttoo" coat, and a battered cocked hat, *minus* the plume.

Was there any chance of the Commander-in-Chief's coming, or even the Lieutenant-Governor of the South-East? House-agents, in the hope of trapping visitors, used to write to the *Agra*, the *Muff*, and other popular newspapers, that positive assurance had been received of the Chief's coming, and that Lungoor Abbey, the most gorgeous mansion in the place, had been secured for his use,

while his Excellency had as little idea of a journey to Paharnauth as of a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Major and Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Budlee, of the Bengal Blues, was one of the earliest arrivals. He was in such a position in his regiment as to be able to spend six months in the Hills every year, and to get 1,000 rs. annually from his *locum-tenens* for his trouble. I need not explain to professional readers that the above-mentioned sum is a little less than half the command allowance of a regiment for the period. Colonel Budlee was a brisk, lively old fellow, whose age nobody knew. He had a grown-up son in the service; and, but for this fact, he could not be accused of being anything else than a gay bachelor by those who witnessed his gallant attentions towards the ladies.

As Mrs. Ochter mentioned, he had lost his wife many years before. She was a pretty, simple girl, who married Captain Budlee because he asked her, and her mother backed him. He made a very kind and attentive husband for about six weeks; after that, he began to enjoy the mess of his regiment a great deal more than the society of his wife;

he took to billiards, late hours, grilled bones—and evil courses, in fact. She bore it for awhile meekly, tried to remonstrate, but without result. At length when his neglect became systematic, she pined away to a shadow under his eyes, and died in her confinement. It was a release to her, and, I am afraid, to Captain Budlee too. He had made, since then, many efforts to marry again, but never succeeded: his Blue-beard reputation stuck to him through life.

The son never heard from any kind friend the history of his father's married life; so they got on very affectionately together. They had come to Paharnauth, the younger on sick certificate, the elder on leave, and they were of course to live together. Colonel Budlee always advised his son to marry, and get it over as soon as possible.

"Depend upon it, my boy!" said he, with the air of a Solomon, "the married state is the orthodox one. A married man never gets into scrapes; his chances of life are doubled, sir—doubled."

"So are his expenses," would Budlee the younger reply; which sharpness the elder would commend.

saying that it was as good as anything of Tom Sheridan's.

They were a strange couple, Colonel Budlee and his son—Budlee junior, as he used to be called. The son looked upon his father as a necessary incumbrance, and the father upon the son as an ornamental appendage to himself: so they got on very well together, each interfering with the other as little as possible. The younger was rather good-looking, though his eye was full of mischief; intensely conceited, like most young fellows who are good-looking, or fancy themselves so; and as highly unprincipled a young gentleman as I have ever had the pleasure of being acquainted with. He avoided hard drinking, lest he should commit himself or betray a secret when under its influence. This was his only good point, if it can be so called, when the motive for his abstinence is taken into account. He paid his mess bill by his winnings at billiards for the first couple of months after he joined his regiment; but this vein was soon exhausted, for somehow his brother officers, just then, ceased to care about playing with him. Whist

was slow and unprofitable, and there was too much chance in loo to allow of his enjoying it; he was in his element at *écarté*. To see him in a corner of the ante-room on a guest-night with some stranger griff, was quite a treat to the lovers of the solitary game. He loved horses, as things to be bought cheap and sold dear; and to crown the catalogue of his recommendations, he particularly affected the character of a lady-killer. So much for Budlee junior.

Budlee père was nothing worse than a profoundly selfish, heartless man, improvident but not dishonourable. He was a pattern of virtue when contrasted with his boy, just out of his teens. He dressed and made himself up in order to look younger than he was—a folly which is seldom to be met with in India—his object evidently being to marry again, as I have before hinted. From seeing him, particularly in the society of his juniors, which he much relished, one would conclude that the position in life he was most fitted to adorn was a chair at the liveliest window of the Mooltanee Club in London, where he might be surrounded by a host of friends,

old and young. But such joys had no attraction for him ; since even for a year's furlough, to say nothing of retirement, he had ever a strong aversion. He had known debt from his cornet days, and when, in addition to taking good care of himself, he had to rear, educate, and outfit Budlee junior, for whom he obtained an infantry commission, his embarrassments had very much increased : so he saw nothing before him but to die in harness. His son and he had a tacit understanding that money-matters should never be alluded to in their intercourse with each other ; once, indeed, Æneas began to talk of the folly of going into debt, even holding himself up as an awful example of the consequences, when Ascanius cut him short with—

“Did you ever live for a month on your pay before you became captain, sir?”

“Well, you know I told you, my boy, how I first got dipped—went security for Churbee ; he went home sick—died there,—no other security ; no insurance.”

“I heard all that lately ; but about living on your pay?” persisted Juvenis.

"Well, I am afraid I never did, until I married; and you know how short a time your poor mother was left to me; but we lived much more expensively in those days than young fellows now. Avoid the banks!"

"I am not in more than three; and I shall avoid the others, as you wish it," replied the son, coolly.

"Will you walk down to the Club?"

The father acknowledged the son's superiority, and talked about his cleverness with sincere delight to his acquaintance. Many could have enlightened him upon this point; but society is charitable to fathers, and no one cared to make this one unhappy, by telling him how very black his only sheep was. He loved his son after his own fashion, little knowing that but for the use of his house and table, which the latter had the free enjoyment of, this hopeful youngster would scarcely have acknowledged his sire's existence. People often repeat, "Ignorance is bliss;" but I don't think even the gentle Gray himself, much less those who quote him, understood the value of the negative happiness it gives us. Take your dearest friend, or mine, *cariissime lector!*

If every action and thought of his existence were to be searchingly sifted and analyzed, would he come forth in our estimation unscathed from the ordeal? And you, my dear Mrs. Cabootur! do you think your handsome Alfred, with whom you bill and coo all day long, could not possibly suffer by such a process? Of course you say,—“He couldn’t,” but what do you think? Nothing should we be more thankful for than our ignorance, in the restricted sense of not knowing each other thoroughly. Rare is the house without a skeleton, and far rarer still is the breast, male or female, within which some little secret does not lurk, always threatening to pop out and reveal itself.

Not that I think Budlee junior would have been much concerned if his father knew all that might be told of him. If “the governor” had money to bequeath, it might have been different; but he was as much dependent upon his monthly pay-bill as the son himself, who treated him accordingly. Young Budlee freely acknowledged himself to be a “loose fish;” he never made any pretence to good conduct; but he had not the remotest idea—if he had, he might

have quaked, precociously hardened as he was—that his friends knew him to be a much looser fish than he pronounced himself. Thoroughly “screwed” as young Lound of the Civil Service was, the night Budlee, junior, won eight hundred rupees of him at *écarté*, he was sober enough to remember, and tell everybody, that Budlee turned up the king ten times in succession after the stakes were doubled.

When a true story like this is circulated of any one, it is certain to be capped with a dozen false ones; so Budlee was considered a notorious black-leg, when he believed himself considered a *roué* at worst, and, as such, rather acceptable in society than otherwise. Every one knows that the ladies like nobody better than a wicked young man; at least wicked young men think so, and it must be a great consolation to them in their progress through the world.

Colonel Budlee, when dressed in rather brilliant mufti, looked very presentable at a distance, or in a dimly lighted room. He was always elaborate in his dress, believing that well-arranged apparel makes at least half the man and three-quarters the officer.

His face wore, however, furrows which could not be smoothed away like the creases of his light blue coat; there were dental deficiencies which knew no remedy in those days, and a considerable hiatus in the hair department, which could not be got rid of without borrowing somebody else's—a deception which our colonel despised. He had lived too carefully all his life to need any padding. He may have tampered with the natural hue of his moustache and whiskers, but that is neither here nor there. Though he troubled himself more about his outward appearance than was necessary for a man of his years, and though he very nearly deserved the title of “old beau,” the most pitiable name man can bear, yet he never at this period made advances to representatives of the “Spin” tribe. This should be recorded to his honour. His aim was some comfortable widow, whose affectionate and prudent “dear deceased” might have bequeathed something to her, over and above the fund pension “of her rank.” He saw no reason why Mrs. Ochter should not marry again. He knew she had some property; he could tell off upon his fingers the names and rents of a

dozen estates, as they are grandiloquently styled in Paharnauth, and he had heard that there were as many, in stations of some size, on the plains. Mrs. Ochter had never given him any particular encouragement, but she was always very gracious, and had indeed, as he heard, defended him from his enemies when his previous married career was discussed, as it used to be regularly, wherever he went.

The memory of a man or woman's misdeeds never dies out in India. Let an unfortunate go where he will, within the limits of his presidency, and he is sure to find somebody who was at Blankabad when that court of inquiry was ordered to assemble some dozen years before, or when he got horse-whipped at the band one evening. The colonel's principal object in coming to Paharnauth, next after enjoying himself, was to prosecute his suit for the plump hand of the widow. Whether or not she guessed as much, I cannot pretend to say. "Not that it is any use," said the colonel to himself, "my making up to Mrs. O., until those three daughters of hers are off the hooks. She will be so infernally busy husband-hunting on their account for the next six

months, that I can make no way at all. What a nuisance daughters are! must take Ned to call there. Gad! I must not bring him often; he is not a bad-looking scamp, and the old woman might suspect something. Not that I think Ned would marry the prettiest girl under the sun, for nothing—a great deal too wide awake for that.”

Budlee *jils*, who found Paharnauth rather slow, and wished that he had put off the illness for a fortnight on the strength of which he had done the doctors, and got away from his work for six months, highly approved of visiting at Beauclerc Cottage in company with his father. Three weeks afterwards, when the Kilta Club and the Clive Arms would be crammed with card and billiard loving fellows, he would have no time at his disposal for such slow work as visiting an old lady with three daughters. “Spins,” he would declare, “are too expensive a luxury for me. What possible use is a wife of your own? She must become a bore sooner or later! How the deuce is it that girls in India never have a rap? Surely they must have fathers, and mothers, and rich miserly uncles, and maiden aunts, like girls

in any other part of the world! Some of them bring you 'interest' certainly, but that is rather too unsubstantial a fortune for me. As soon as I hear of a girl with money, I will go in for her; but until then, marriage be hanged!" Arm in arm with his father, in a dutiful way, young Budlee, neatly dressed and decidedly good-looking, made his appearance at Beauclerc Cottage, and both were admitted to the drawing-room, which they found empty.

"First chop turn-out this. Never saw anything like it in India. Old Ochter must have been rich, faith!" were the remarks of the son as he looked round the handsomely-furnished room.

"Never talk too loud in a house in India, Ned; you never know who may be listening," said Colonel Budlee, in a cautious half-whisper. "Did I never tell you what happened to Brown of my regiment, when he was calling on old General Peet?"

"Of course! I remember. Served him right, too!" replied Ned, who had never heard the story, and did not at all wish to hear it. "Not a bad picture that! very odd you never see a decent picture or bust in a house in this country."

"I have seen them somewhere: yes, in the old Rajah of Shirwaun's palace. I remember in the same room I counted twenty soup tureens of different patterns—he thought they were vases. He had also an immense collection of all sorts of fire-irons—he thought they were weapons used by the English in battle. Hospitable old fellow rather, always giving us dinners. Goat and champagne, every man bringing his own table utensils. D—d shame to stick him, as the English merchants did! one fellow in Calcutta sent him a six-horse hearse, black feathers and all, telling him it was an exact copy of the state palkeegharee used by the king of England. The poor old Rajah believed him, and drove out in it, stretched at full length in the place for the coffins; but, gad! it came to the Governor-General's ears, and poor Sungeen, the Resident, was sent back to his regiment for allowing it."

So old Budlee maundered on, for he was a very loquacious creature, and occasionally amusing, his memory being filled with a strange farrago of mess-room stories and station gossip, in which truth was the most trivial element; the son, meanwhile, sitting

in submissive, yawning silence. When his father came to a pause for want of breath, he asked,

“How many daughters did you say there are?”

Colonel Budlee, with a precautionary frown, held up three digits, and started off again on a safer tack.

“I was taken over this house often in poor Colonel Ochter’s day; and though he hated England himself, he told me his intention was to make it as thoroughly English as possible, down to the very bell-ropes, that his girls might not feel the change when they came out. I never knew so single-hearted and generous a man. The men would have done anything for him—the whole regiment, officers and all, were in tears over his grave!”

“He must have cut up devilish well,” broke in Ned, deaf and blind, purposely, to the elder’s remonstrances and winks.

The father was about to give way to his feelings and temper, which latter was none of the best, for he knew that his son was intentionally annoying him, when the door fortunately opened, with that rustle which heralds the entrance of ladies; and the full-

rigged Mrs. Ochter, with the yacht Esther gliding along in her wake, sailed graciously in.

“ Ah! Colonel Budlee, how do you do? Your son, I suppose?” said Mrs. Ochter, shaking the younger Budlee’s hand warmly, after having gone through the same process with the elder. “ Must I introduce you to my eldest daughter Esther?” The young lady bent backward with that solemn courtesy by which the sex acknowledges the existence of a male stranger; but the gallant colonel claimed the hand-touching privilege of an old acquaintance, which she accorded with severe dignity. The flexing formula having been gone through again for his son’s behoof, the colonel, as is usual on those occasions, told the nymph that he remembered being introduced to her exact counterpart, he must not say how many years ago. When he first began to speak, she thought he was alluding to long clothes existence; but seeing his meaning, she was thinking what she ought to say, when her mother spoke :

“ Not tired of nonsense yet, Colonel Budlee? I am quite ashamed of you! Have you felt better since you got here?” she said, turning towards his son.

"Very much indeed, thank you."

"I am glad to hear it. You remain here during the whole hot season?"

"My movements depend a good deal upon my father. If he had not taken a house here, I should have been obliged to remain in the plains."

Young Budlee could talk very well to elderly and married ladies. With younger ones he ran aground directly. The above truthful speech, delivered in a mild voice, being over, Mrs. Ochter asked:

"Do young officers still become very ill about March and April? When I lived in the plains it invariably happened so; we never could account for it," she said, with a sedate look.

"This old female goes in for mild chaff:" such was Lieutenant Edward Budlee's thought, freely translated in his own language; his reply was in the same subdued tone as before,

"I generally suffer very much at the commencement of the hot weather: the doctors tell me I returned to India too young."

"No better than you are said to be," was Mrs.

Ochter's mental verdict. "You will get accustomed to it, I hope, in time," she replied; and addressed his father (who was in the meantime exchanging commonplaces with Esther) with a cheerful,—

"Tell me everything about everybody in the Blues, Colonel Budlee: so poor Mrs. Passey lost her baby?"

And Mrs. Ochter and her old friend went in for an hour's talk, interesting to themselves no doubt, but by no means so to the reader or the writer. Esther sat patiently, with a listening air, young Budlee looking at her stealthily, with a mingled expression of admiration and awe. If it were not for his exalted opinion of himself, the mere sight of a fair innocent creature like Esther, of her golden hair, her kind soft eyes, her gentle Madonna expression must have touched him. But he sat and looked like a Satyr leering at a Daphne. He would have spoken to her at once, but he could not settle how to address such a Peri. Esther knew that he ought to say something; and therefore concluded that he must be a very stupid young man, though his face was not

at all so. Louisa and Gertrude were all this time screwing up their courage to present themselves. Louisa, hoping to escape, had lingered over her toilet; but Mrs. Ochter had made her promise to come down to the drawing-room the moment she was ready. Gertrude was bold enough, but she had taken an observation of the visitors by the corners of the house, and had determined that they were not worthy of the honour of her acquaintance. She had, in consequence, declared her intention of not appearing to mamma, and was much disappointed that mamma approved of it. The old lady had not yet decided whether Gerty should come out this season or not.

"I suppose I may come down with Loo if I like?" pouted Gerty, just before mamma left to go to her visitors.

"Why, you did not want to come a moment ago; what a strange child you are, my dear! Of course, come with Loo."

Gertrude, the youngest of her flock, possibly the most loved, had evidently very much of her own way. We hear a great deal of spoiled children, and

of the awful consequences, in after life, which befall such children. This is fallacy. Three weeks of a public school, in the case of a boy, neutralize years of "spoiling," and girls get rid of the ill-effects by some spontaneous process. I never met a lady yet, of any age, of whom it could be predicated with any safety, from anything she said or did, that she was spoiled in childhood.

Louisa found herself dressed for visitors at last, and came shyly into the room with Gertrude. The colonel was very much surprised at finding one daughter so plain. An Erinnys looks very much worse side by side with the Graces: so Louisa's bad points were made all the worse by the contrast with her brilliant sisters. Introductions finished, Louisa fled to a distant sofa. Gerty paraded herself in front, and was reviewing very much to her own satisfaction the appearance of both visitors, when a sudden growl and a snap were heard: and young Budlee started from his chair with a look of alarm and a phrase or two fortunately drowned in the furious barking which ensued.

"It is only Jock," said Gerty, laying hold of his

jaws and grasping them with all her might. Jock had come to the door, and looked in—he saw only a strange form on a chair, and two strange legs a little in front. Being a dog of limited inductive reasoning powers, and unaccustomed to visitors, he rushed at once to the conclusion that the strange legs had no title to be there, and had sprung upon them ferociously. Fortunately, no harm was done, and Gertrude apologized warmly.

“I am very sorry indeed. Oh, Jock! you are always doing something wrong. I hope you are not hurt?”

“Oh, dear, no! only somewhat astonished. Pray, let him go; he looks so miserable with his mouth held fast.”

“I am afraid he will bark again,” said poor Gertrude, releasing him at the same time. Jock did bark again, nearly as badly as before, so Gertrude had nothing for it but to carry him off, feeling very much ashamed of him.

“Won’t you stay for tiffin?” asked Mrs. Ochter, as Colonel Budlee, after a long visit, made a motion to go.

"Thank you, no! I have letters to write," replied that gentleman, who, much as he loved ladies' society, preferred men's at tiffin, that he might smoke his cheroot and drink his midday brandy-and-water ("cold without") quietly afterwards. His son and he then bowed themselves out and sauntered homeward; Juvenis praising Esther much—"Never saw so fine a girl," &c., and cursing Jock; while Senex was hungry and cross, and inclined to lecture his boy for not making the most of himself.

"You never opened your lips to the daughter—you, who pretend to be such a swell amongst the women. Just as well you didn't, Master Ned. Grapes don't grow for bumpkins. She is ticketed at much too high a figure for a poor devil of a subaltern. She would not look at you, my boy."

"I thought Mrs. Ochter and you were very old friends?" said the son.

"So we are."

"Why, she snubbed you, to begin with, if that is a sign of her regard."

"Oh! that's her way," said the colonel, who, however, felt that his son was hitting him back, and that

he had an inkling of his projects with regard to Mrs. Ochter, which the senior did not like at all.

And so this worthy pair, block and chip, got home at last.

CHAPTER VI.

A MOTHER'S LETTER.

Mrs. OCHTER had dined, on the day Colonel Budlee called, at her usual early hour; indeed the tiffin, which she asked Colonel Budlee to partake of, was the family dinner; but this little deceit is by no means confined to Beauclerc Cottage. Nothing is more common than for a guileless bachelor to be "taken in and done for" in this way. A married friend invites him to "tiff" at half-past two: he accepts, and finds, to his unspeakable dismay, an array of soup and fish, boiled, roast, and pasty, all of which he is expected to try. The result is, that about 5 P.M. he is turned out into the hot air, full *cibo vinoque*—of victuals and beer,—feeling heady and miserable, and anxious to sleep the load off, though he has two guests to meet and entertain at the mess-dinner at eight. All this suffering might have been avoided if his entertainers

could bring themselves to acknowledge their modest midday repast a dinner. Why need they be ashamed of saying, "We dine at 2·30 sharp." Let me assure such folk, that a man who has a just appreciation of his food and feeding hours, cannot bear to be victimized in this way, and he will never forgive it. I do not desire to be considered an advocate in any way for early dining. It is one of those unaccountable miseries adhering to domestic life in India. How people practise it, and survive, I am not prepared to explain.

In Beaclerc Cottage, the habit was defensible enough: there they did not dine with the thermometer at 100, nor had they to digest their food at the same temperature, nor had they to drive forth at sunset, with flushed faces, buzzing heads, and loaded stomachs, as do the victims to the same habit in the plains. Mrs. Ochter had dined, and so had her three daughters. They had discussed Colonel Budlee and his son from every point of view, and the juniors had unanimously decided that the society of neither was likely to prove an acquisition. Gerty said that Mr. Budlee, junior, looked just as if he wished

to strangle the innocent Jock merely for doing what he considered his duty. Esther said that there was something very unpleasant in his expression, and that she was sure he did not love his father; though she added, "I cannot blame him much for that." Louisa generally concurred, without giving her reasons. Gracious! how poor innocent men are torn in pieces by their critics of the other gender! every defect is discovered in a moment, be it mental or bodily. I don't know how or why it is, but women are much sharper in discerning character and disposition than the nominally ruling sex, and they can make themselves much more inscrutable if they please. Herein they have an immense advantage, and it is but right they should, poor things! Mamma scolded her daughters gently for their fastidiousness and rash judgment, carefully concealing from them all she knew about father and son. When they left her to go to the drawing-room, just as she was sinking into her usual afternoon slumber, one of the servants brought in a letter which had just come from Chillumpore. "Mrs. Kookrie, I suppose," she said, to herself, as she broke the seal; "what does

she write for now?" After reading a few lines, her face began to change; she got through it with difficulty, looking more and more alarmed. At last she called, as calmly as she could,

"Esther, Esther, come here!"

All three ran into the parlour, but she said again, "Only Esther, my darlings!" and the other two retreated.

"Oh, Esther! I have had such a letter!"

Esther began to tremble. She was afraid something dreadful had occurred; poor Henry dead perhaps, for she knew he was the only one in India, out of their own circle, about whom Mrs. Ochter could be so much affected.

Esther's colour began to vanish, fancying her surmise must be correct, when her mother, alarmed in her turn, said,—

"I have had some unpleasant news about Henry; but he is quite well."

"Thank God!" said Esther. "I was fancying all sorts of things."

Esther managed to ward off the faintness which had nearly seized her, and said,—

"Is he in any trouble?"

"Not even that exactly, dear. How I wish he had consulted me! read this letter and tell me what you think of it."

Esther, gradually becoming herself again, read it through and gave it back to her mother, saying, cheerfully,—

"Well, mamma, as far as I can make out, Henry is in love with a young lady with a very pretty name, and a very pretty face, a daughter of a colonel too, like some other young ladies I know. Nothing so very horrible in all that, mamma!"

But mamma could not make light of the matter, so she thought better to have a cry over it, which she accordingly had, to poor Esther's great distress.

"Dear, dear mamma!" she said, "what is there so very wrong?"

Esther's equanimity rather annoyed her mother; her daughter did not see the great wrong she had suffered.

"Not quite certain whether they are engaged, but everybody says they are," she sobbed out, quoting Mrs. Kookrie's kind letter. "Never thought of his

mother. Her opinion is worth nothing. A girl whom nobody knows anything about,—only three weeks at Chillumpore. Oh, Henry, I never expected this from you!”

So the poor lady went on, until sorrow subsided, and a feeling something like anger arose up to take its place, that her only son should throw her over; should not even consider her worth the poor compliment of asking her opinion or advice in a matter of so much importance,—he, whom she had rescued from so many scrapes, for whom she procured a civil appointment, entirely by her own exertions, and nobody knew how much she had undergone when trying to get it for him. “This is all the gratitude he shows me.” Poor Mrs. Ochter! I believe her pride more than any other feeling was wounded by her son’s “sinful behaviour.” If he had only written her a line to say how his affections were engaged, and how worthy a young lady had engaged them, she would have sent them both her blessing by return of post, though she might have wished him a better “connection,”—one which would secure his advancement in the service for example. But that she

should first hear of his love-story from a strange hand, was galling in the extreme.

Young birds, once out of the parental nest, are too apt to ignore its existence for evermore. Once started in life ourselves, do we ever again seriously consider the claims of those who have nursed, educated, and watched over us for the third part of our average existence at least? What, as a general rule, does a son value a father at, who, after a preliminary twenty years of expense and anxiety, pushes him out into the world at last, with a fair career before him? Does he consider himself as under an incalculable obligation to him, or does he not rather take all as a matter of course; and, as a token of his appreciation, draw a bill now and then upon his aged sire? Fathers and mothers can forgive much; but an engagement, hastily contracted without their cognizance, and without peculiar advantages, by sons or daughters, is a capital crime in the code parental. A son may disgrace himself and them by vicious conduct; he may be a scandalous, good-for-nothing profligate; but bad though he be, he will find acceptance in the parental bosom, while

his brother, whose virtuous and dutiful life may never have caused father or mother a moment's uneasiness, will be infallibly cast out of doors, and spurned for ever, because he has engaged to marry his sister's governess, however respectable and accomplished she may be.

Mrs. Ochter, somewhat misled by Mrs. Kookrie's letter, concluded that her son had engaged himself; and in her just indignation she resolved to write to him, and give him a "piece of her mind."

Esther fought the absent brother's battle, did all she could to soothe her mother, and to prove to her that she had better wait in the hope of hearing from the delinquent himself; that anything she might write at present could do no good, and might do much harm; and that it was clear Mrs. Kookrie's statements were not to be relied on, as that lady particularly begged that her name should not be mentioned as Mrs. Ochter's informant. But the old lady was not to be restrained. She accused Esther of siding against her, which sent poor Esther in tears to her own room. "She knew quite well what was best to be done." So left alone, and very unhappy,

Mrs. Ochter sat down to compose a letter to her son.

A strangely disjointed, blotted, tear-stained letter it was;—a mixture of cautions, reproaches, and prayers, which I must not attempt to copy here. It should be mentioned that a tone of *sæva indignatio* prevailed throughout. There were warnings against sudden love-marriages prudently or imprudently interspersed; and, more than all, a warmly worded wish that no flirt should ever be daughter-in-law of hers, or sister for her girls.

Poor Esther watched, with eyes red with weeping, the messenger go forth bearing the missive of which she guessed the contents; while her sisters, who had heard her sobs as she went upstairs, sat together in the darkening drawing-room, not daring to conjecture what might have happened. Mrs. Ochter came in at length, and asked them with assumed cheerfulness why they had not gone out? She then went to reconcile herself to Esther, and succeeded of course; but altogether it was a very gloomy afternoon at Beauclerc Cottage. The feeling of constraint would have made all uncomfortable at tea-time; but just

before night fell, Esther saw a tall figure approaching her two sisters in the garden, and then she heard Gertrude, who ran towards the house, calling out,—

“ Oh, mamma! here’s Mr. Gregorian come; and he wants to know whether we can spare him a cup of tea.”

The Rev. Richard Anselm Gregorian, late Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, was the chaplain or vicar of Paharnauth, and as such was made welcome by the Beauclerc household. Mrs. Ochter came forth to meet him with a smiling countenance; she was largely endowed with that faculty which most women possess in a greater or less degree,—of banishing at least all outward traces of anxiety or grief, when it is expedient. So the Rev. R. A. Gregorian could never have gathered from her air or words, that there was an *atra cura* hovering about, and waiting only for his departure to settle upon her brow again. I do not consider myself called upon to explain how it was that a Fellow of his College, and unmarried, came to sacrifice his home prospects, and to accept a chaplaincy on the Honourable Com-

pany's establishment. University men are rare in India; and the few I ever encountered could tell me nothing of the Fellow of Magdalen, or the reasons (*quo numine læso*) of his being an exile in India. The general idea was, that though his talents were undoubted, his views upon some important points of Church discipline and ceremony were peculiar, if not absolutely unsound, and that the bishop, though he had not hesitated about ordaining him, had communicated a suspicion about his orthodoxy to the heads of his college, and that his position therein had been in consequence rendered uncomfortable. Some such story there was, never very clear to me; but at all events there hung a little mystery over the Rev. R. Anselm Gregorian, as he styled himself on his neat visiting card, printed in black letter, at one corner of which stood in small print the words Magdalen College, with a pen stroke run neatly across them, and "Vernon Lodge," the name of his Paharnauth residence; written in a delicate hand above. He was a man of two or three and thirty, with a rather portly figure that you could not help associating with "Stroke oars" and the "College eleven," well shaped and

muscular withal. The way he sat his shaggy tattoo, reminded you, too, of the hunting men of England, and set you thinking whether he ever, in tops and pink, ill-concealed by the undergraduate gown, attended morning chapel before riding to cover, like the fast university men we read of. His clothes had that decided glossy blackness which only clergymen can wear with advantage; his neckerchief was white as snow, and decorously tied; his boots fitted him exquisitely, and were always of lacquered leather. His face was intellectual and handsome, with perhaps too studious an arrangement of hair for one of his cloth. He was courteous and affable in his manner, a favourite clergyman with the ladies, and welcome at all messes, where he drank his moderate quota of wine, and became genial like the rest after dinner.

His notions of matters ecclesiastic I must touch upon as lightly as possible. If he existed now-a-days I believe he would be styled a moderate High Churchman; he had taste for Gothic architecture, carved and ornate church furniture, embossed book-bindings and ancient devotional music. Without rushing up to the altitude denoted at the present day by

M. B. waistcoats, parched-pea dietaries on fast days, altar flowers and lights, gorgeous vestments, and such other bones of contention between High and Low, he was decidedly of opinion that a moderate appeal to the senses might be safely and profitably made in church ceremonials, without trenching upon the regions of mummary or superstition. In his day such trivial deviations as he encouraged from the old path excited very little attention in England, and none at all in India: no one of any status in his flock declared himself a dissenter from the Rev. Mr. Gregorian's views. He was earnest without being zealous, did not pretend in the least to condemn the loaves and fishes, and considered himself justified in using as a reason against his taking part in missionary work, the fact that the Company was opposed to it. He was paid, he said, for ministering to the Europeans alone, and there was a tacit understanding that his ministrations should not extend beyond them. Candour of this kind does not pay in the world, lay or clerical; and many good-natured friends of Mr. Gregorian were of opinion that he had mistaken his profession.

He was not the only church visitor at Beauclerc Cottage. Thither also came, and was civilly received, though not welcomed, the Rev. Mortimer O'Moyhan, B.A., or, as Thackeray says Irish graduates style themselves, Bay Ah, of Trinity College, Dublin, and one of the deputies to heathen India of the Orbis Terrarum Missionary Society. He had a fine brogue, slovenly habits, and one hundred and fifty rupees a month. He always presented himself with thick brogues,—which, being interpreted, signifies the shoes of his native country,—a big stick and a dirty subscription book; and like a sturdy vagrant, or an Italian street musician, he had to be bribed before he left the house. From his pulpit, a camp table in the mission church bungalow, the Rev. Mortimer (known in former years as “dirty Murty,” in the “nate” town of Ballyvolane, in the “kingdom” of Kerry) used, in the choicest Milesian, to denounce the doings of the Rev. Anselm very freely, having declared war against him for refusing, whether rightly or wrongly, to allow a collection to be made for his “schule” in Paharnauth Church. The Hibernian agitator managed, like most agitators, to get a

following; and miserable as it was, it still acted as a thorn in the side of the more polished churchman: not but that he always spoke in the friendliest language of his rev. brother, and expressed regret at his inability to take any part in his holy work.

The Rev. Anselm Gregorian found himself much more comfortable in mind and body in the Hills than he had been during his tour of duty in the Plains. With the officers he got on very well. I heard more than one sub say,—and this is the highest compliment I have ever known paid to the clergy by such heedless youths,—“I was never late for dinner on a Sunday evening when Padre Gregorian preached.” With the soldiers, however, the reverend gentleman confessed himself puzzled.

“I don’t know how it is,” he would say; “but I never go into the ‘European’ hospitals, at any hour of the day, without finding four-fifths of the men asleep. I may hear them talking and laughing as I approach, but the moment I show my face at a door of the ward they fall into the profoundest slumber. How I wish I could understand them!” he would add, seriously.

In Paharnauth, however, all was *couleur de rose*. The ladies were delighted to find a clergyman who, because he had no wife of his own perhaps, was always eager for their advice and help. Sundry little embroiderments, braidings, and such like, which in these days would be looked upon with dire suspicion, were furnished by many fair hands working in union for the church. Small oratorios were got up (the tickets for which cost a gold mohur each) to enable him to pay for an organ and a gorgeous stained-glass window; and Mr. Gregorian felt much happier amid his Hill congregation than in the ugly barn he officiated in when on duty in the plains, with an audience that comprehended him quite as little as he comprehended them.

Such was the Rev. R. Anselm Gregorian; and I need not say, he was much cherished by the Beauclerc Cottage folk, who made his acquaintance early, and considered him the only enjoyable person they had yet met in India. He accompanied them to the house, and it was clear that he was valued by the ladies: even Louisa in his company forgot her shyness and her sorrows.

"And how is my old friend Henry?" said Mr. Gregorian, who had met him long before in England.

"He is quite well, thank you," replied Mrs. Ochter, coldly, while the tears forced their way into Esther's kind eyes again, at the mention of his name.

"Something wrong here," thought the clergyman : so he changed the subject to a plan of a fancy fair he proposed to get up to raise funds for a campanile and set of bells for the church.

Mrs. Ochter was silent for a short time, thinking whether it might not be advisable to consult the chaplain about her son's unfortunate affairs. Already she began to have some misgiving about the hastiness with which she had acted, and she hoped to find that Mr. Gregorian would approve of the course she had taken. Esther was rather relieved when Mrs. Ochter asked him whether he had time for a private conversation with her. Of course the clergyman had. So the three girls left the room, and Esther was immediately besieged by her sisters to tell them "what it was all about." She declined, until mamma gave her leave. She would only tell them

that something had occurred, not very serious, but sufficient to annoy mamma a good deal.

About twenty minutes afterwards, they heard Mr. Gregorian leave the house in great haste, and his pony clattering down the path which led to the Mall in a most reckless manner. They were called into tea by their mother, who was looking ill at ease, and who listened anxiously for the sounds of his return. He came at last, looked in, and said,—

“Too late, I am very sorry to say. It went by this evening’s post. All that remains is to write again to-morrow.”

Mr. Gregorian spoke sadly, and a gloom settled on Mrs. Ochter’s brow.

“Thank you very much for all the trouble you have taken! I will certainly do as you advised. I was afraid it was too late. You are not going without your tea,” said Mrs. Ochter, not forgetful of the laws of hospitality in the midst of her troubles.

But it is so late that Mr. Gregorian must say good-night, and away he went.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSEQUENCES.

MISS YONGE, in one of her charming books, makes a secondary hero recommend to his lady-love a course of algebra, as an agreeable sedative to counteract the violence of her emotions, and to prevent her from thinking too much on his superb self. Our poor friend, Lony Ochter, would have benefited much if he had only known of this valuable antidote, though Miss Yonge does not say whether it is equally effectual in the case of male as of female patients. If conscience makes cowards of us all, love makes —— of us all, while the paroxysm lasts; and in Lony Ochter's case the symptoms were very severe. He omitted to visit his stables for two successive days. When the syce told him that his pet waler had "gripes," he heard him without emotion. His cheroots went out in his mouth; he sat in Cutcherry

without suffering any uneasiness from his ignorance of the cases he decided; he laughed aloud when he read an urgent letter from the Manager of the Meehurbanee Bank, on the subject of unpaid instalments, though, previously, the mere sight of his hand-writing made his blood run cold. Appetite he had none: that is an understood thing. Sleep he had little, and of a poor quality, consisting entirely of a series of harrowing dreams, in which Flora appeared, arrayed in the regulation bridal apparel, and about to become somebody else's.

A repetition of the garden scene would have made him hate Stapleton for ever; but the Syren's bewitching smiles, devoted exclusively to himself the next evening, together with a few words of cautious disparagement of the N.I. captain, which she took care to let fall, had quite the opposite effect, and he liked Stapleton afterwards, even more than he had done before. Ought he, could he, with any decency, propose for Miss Armit without further delay? If she were to return to Nakpore suddenly,—and she might be recalled at any moment, indeed she hinted as much to him,—would he not be “left lamenting,”

and the most miserable of men? He racked his brains for a parallel case. Had he ever heard of a man's going in and winning after less than a month's acquaintance, and a few short conversations. He had positively settled, in his inmost soul, that Flora was the most adorable of women,—a jewel beyond price. What did she think about him? In the fervour of his admiration he even forgot what a good match he was; one of the heaven-born, a man of wide-spread authority and rule, with no end of powerful connections, and with the most exalted position in the land in prospect. The honest fellow forgot all that, in the height of his fever, though he had often thought thereon before. It never occurred to him that it would be the correct thing to consult Mrs. Ochter, or that she would be certain to lay down a safe course for him. Does it ever occur to unfortunates in his position that they should fall back for guidance upon the experienced parent? Never, or very rarely. No young fellow, unless one slightly removed from an idiot, will come to his mother, and say, "I am in love with Miss Jones, ma'am. Please tell me what I ought to do." No girl, not a simpleton, will throw

her arms round mamma's neck, and whisper, "I love George Snooks," without the said George's declaring himself first. It is, after all, though fathers and mothers never can understand it, but just and proper that sons and daughters should act independently, to a certain extent, when "casting a die of the greatest contingency," as Jeremy Taylor has it. Supposing a marriage made altogether by the respective parents, for their off-spring's behoof, to turn out most unhappily, as will sometimes happen, what more bitter or heart-rending thoughts can dwell in human bosom than those parents are racked by, who are compelled to say, "This is our doing; our children have to thank us for this." When the above eloquent divine wrote of a woman with "an evil husband," that "she must dwell upon her sorrow, and hatch the eggs which *her own* folly or infelicity hath produced," he never contemplated the possibility of a woman being allowed no choice at all, or of her having to suffer for the "folly and infelicity" of those who have blindly chosen for her.

I may not venture to describe the effect upon her son, of poor angry Mrs. Ochter's letter. Naturally

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hot-headed, he was furious for a time, and entirely oblivious of his mother's claims upon him. He could think of nothing but the cruel words she used with reference to the girl he loved; and even the most indulgent and self-sacrificing mother will not be forgiven by the best of sons for an attack upon the chosen of his heart. He sat down half-a-dozen times, and commenced a more passionate and cruel reply; but fortunately his heart smote him each time. Then a torrent of abuse was poured upon the head of his mother's informant, who misrepresented Flora's modest and gentle conduct so grossly; but "he would show them both how little he regarded such calumnies! Easily taken in, indeed! 'Pon my life, it is too bad! If I could not swear to her hand-writing I should never believe my mother wrote this. Esther—that's the word! she was going to say something about her, and she scratched it out again."

Turning this great wrong over and over in his mind, wondering why his mother should take such a grudge against a girl she had never seen,—why Esther did not write him a line, at least,—and feeling himself in duty bound not to be in the least degree

influenced by the (expletive) letter, he made a resolution to go at once and ask Flora to be his wife. "I cannot be any unhappier than I am now if she does 'jawab' me, and people may say what they like." This last muttered defiance had reference to the short-acquaintance stumbling-block, which looked so formidable before. "I never can forgive my mother, never! As for this (expletive) letter, I will answer it to-morrow."

He ordered his buggy, dressed, and having relieved his feelings greatly by half murdering his innocent bearer for giving him two left-hand gloves—an offence which, on another occasion, would have been sufficiently punished by a reprimand in Hindostanee, he drove off to Major Skewbald's, still thinking over his mother's inexplicable harshness. He found himself at the major's door, with a gaunt native waiting for his card, before he had arranged a speech suitable for the occasion, or even determined whether he should speak to Flora or her aunt. He first thought he ought to drive off, arrange his ideas, and return; then he felt confident that the people knew he had come, and that he was fairly in for it. The sapient

Mrs. Skewbald, having satisfied herself that Flora was in the drawing-room, and, hoping that the time had come, told the servant, when he brought Mr. Ochter's card, to show him in there; and, herself considerably "flustered," rushed off to the major's office to share her hopes with her lord.

This gallant officer, seated at a camp-table puzzling over a return, in shirt sleeves marked all over with his signature, which was printed thereon in every direction, claims to be "trotted out" before my readers as the uncle by marriage of the young lady in whose presence Mr. Henry Lony Ochter is at this moment sitting in extreme trepidation.

Major Skewbald, commanding left wing 99th Buffadars, and the station of Chillumpore, had for five-and-thirty years consumed the salt of the Honourable East India Company. He was not what could be called fortunate in his promotion: ten years an ensign, fourteen years a lieutenant. The quality of the aforesaid salt which fell to his share was not very considerable for many years, though he managed not only to subsist upon it, but to lay some by. His face is not striking: it is a hairy, scrubby,

wrinkled countenance, with small, repulsive eyes, a frown-furrowed forehead, close eyebrows, almost joining across the base of a simious nose, prominent cheek-bones, and a facial angle remarkably acute. His frame is large and ill-shapen, his hands big and coarse, and his feet in character. He had the usual rotundity of advanced years about the centre of his person: for fattening food is cheap in India, and he thrived principally upon the preparations of rice and ghee for which the native *cuisine* is famous, but which, strange to say, are not appreciated by the Anglo-Saxon as a general rule. His dietary deserves a little notice. Beer, wine, or alcoholic fluids of any sort he avoided on principle; and for the same reason he rarely offered them to strangers. When driven to it, however, he would order a few bottles from the mess, and put off paying for them as long as possible, in the hope that the wine manager might forget to charge for them at last.

One cannot practise self-denial of this rare kind without obloquy, and the major got his share.

“Principle indeed! I always keep some stale

bottles of beer on purpose for him. To see him gulp the sour stuff down, is a caution!" Burton would say, who had a great contempt for a man who shirked his liquor, no matter on what grounds. "Would he be the mean, miserly, surly, henpecked poor devil he is," Burton would ask, indignantly, "if he drank his bottle of beer like a Christian? No one who takes his beer regularly can be entirely destitute of proper feelings like this old screw. Blowed if I can stand him much longer!"

There was, it must be confessed, ample reason for the harsh epithet which Burton, prejudiced advocate for the cold [brandy and] water treatment as he was, poor fellow, applied to his commanding officer. In or out of uniform, no one in the service could see him without blushing to think that such a man could claim to be called a brother officer. That he could have induced any proper-minded woman to marry him, was indeed a wonder; but it would appear that many women marry solely for the purpose of making martyrs of themselves. This is the only hypothesis upon which I can account for the not uncommon phenomenon of gentle creatures

manacled for life to bears—not post-matrimonial bears either, but animals who were cubs from the earliest period, and who, before possession, never attempted to conceal their claws from their victim. Not that great, coarse Mrs. Skewbald could be called a victim; she held her own from the first. What she could have been like before she became “old Skew—” a frowzy, monthly-nurse style of woman, with a large red nose and a watery eye,—far be it from me to depone. She probably joined her brother, Colonel Armit, in India, and from his house flew to the arms of Skewbald—a pinching subaltern in those days. She was not naturally money-loving: most women are, I am pleased to think, the reverse (better an extravagant wife surely, than a pinching, miserly one!); but though she became very soon the chief ruler of Skewbald’s household and himself, he managed artfully to inoculate her with his *sacra fames* for rupees, and an awful example they both were of the save-all system. They had no children; nor did they, like other husbands and wives, desire them. It makes one shudder to think what a life a child would have led in the Skewbald nursery!

I give no description of the major's professional qualifications: his utter ignorance of things military was the only good point about him: so his officers said, "He never bothers us." Surruck, the second senior, ill-conditioned as he was, was a bright luminary when contrasted with Skewbald. They fought fiercely on all occasions, as might be expected.

"I am sure he is come to propose," said Mrs. Skewbald, depositing herself on an old charpoy with a dirty pillow on it, the only piece of furniture in the room, with the exception of the rickety table the major was sitting at, and the broken-backed chair on which the gallant soldier was seated.

"Who? Ochter? Wish he would, and have done with it. It is time for the girl to go home. She's sure to have him."

"She never opens her lips to me about him; but she is not such a fool as to refuse him," said Mrs. Skewbald, rather scornfully.

"I thought you told me, one time, she was sweet on Stapleton."

"So she was once or twice, but she has not looked at him lately."

"The fellows used, I know, to chaff Stapleton about her : only some dodge of hers, I suppose. She is not half the fool she looks. She has a bit of a temper, too. Does her father know that this young Ochter is after her ? "

"I did not write to him about it—how could I ? She is so deep, that I have no idea what she means to do. But depend upon it," said Mrs. Skewbald, "we'll know all about it soon ! "

"Whether or no, I think you might talk to her about going back to Nakpore. Since she came here, our expenses are more than doubled. And there's that dinner, too," growled the major, with a rueful countenance; "I wish you never asked her here at all. What is she to us, married or single ? Devilish little difference it makes to you or me ! Where are they now ? "

"In the drawing-room, of course. I left her alone there on purpose."

"Well, she can take good care of herself. I must go on with my work,—that Kookrie is no help to me at all."

His faithful wife knew well that if her husband

was deprived, by any accident, of Kookrie's services, the business of his command would come to a deadlock; she was not obliged, however, to dissent from the above statement, and indeed, in justice to her enmity to Mrs. Kookrie, she would have believed it if she could, and would have felt very glad to persuade her husband to ask Kookrie to resign the appointment of acting adjutant to the wing, if she thought he could possibly get on with any of the other officers. It would have been inexpressibly pleasant to her, to see the Kookries reduced to the sweet simplicity of 256 rupees a month. However, this happiness was not to be—no one but Kookrie could or would be adjutant. She was leaving her husband's office, when a servant came to say the gentleman in the drawing-room wished to see her or the major.

"Oh, you go," said the latter; "tell him I am particularly engaged. Come here again as soon as he goes."

Mrs. Skewbald went off arranging her cap—smoothing her by no means silken locks, and thinking on the best form of words in which she ought to congratulate the captive.

There was no mistaking the happy look beaming from Lony Ochter's face, nor the warm pressure of the hand with which he received the—to him—unknown author of his happiness.

"I have only just disposed of an important matter Major Skewbald and I had to arrange to-day, or I should have come before. Dear me, you are all alone! I was certain Miss Armit was here! what can have become of her?" said Mrs. Skewbald, with a hypocritical volubility peculiar to women of her age and tactics.

"She has just gone. May I say a few words to you, Mrs. Skewbald, on a matter of much importance to both of us?" said Mr. Ochter, trying to speak with a solemnity he was too happy to feel.

"Certainly," Mrs. Skewbald replied, putting on a mystified and inquiring air, such as she thought Mr. Ochter expected her to assume, as one entirely ignorant of his proceedings.

"I have ventured," he said, "to let Miss Armit know the state of my feelings towards her; she appears to have been a good deal overcome, but—but——"

Here Mr. Ochter's announcement, composed in the interval between the flight of Flora and the entrance of her aunt, broke down; he hesitated for a little, and Mrs. Skewbald magnanimously helped him on with,—

“Do not say she said No, Mr. Ochter!” pretending to misunderstand the cause of his breakdown.

“She said she could not answer me positively without consulting Colonel and Mrs. Armit; but that if they do not object——”

“I am indeed rejoiced,” said Mrs. Skewbald, with enthusiasm. “I suppose now you wish Major Skewbald or myself to do our best for you with her father,” she continued, with a fervour and solemnity of expression which Ochter himself was collected enough to appreciate as something intensely ridiculous. “Depend upon it, you have our best wishes.”

“I am extremely obliged. I wish to know whether you would recommend my writing at once to Colonel Armit. Might it not appear strange that one perfectly unknown to him should suddenly ask for his child's hand? I have a delicacy about communi-

cating with him, you know, without his having heard about me first from somebody else."

"Oh, I can do you that little service. I will write to my brother to-day. Did you say anything to Flora" (Miss Armit she need call her no more) "about writing?"

"No: I had not time. She proposes, I believe, to return to Nakpore immediately."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Skewbald, fidgeting on her chair, and wishing the visitor to notice it, that he might take warning and go, as his presence was no longer required.

He did notice it, and got up, bidding her "good-bye," and asking her to send him a line if necessary.

"I won't forget," she replied, bounding off, in a fever of curiosity, towards Flora's chamber. She fortunately thought on the way that the major must be informed, and turned towards his office first.

Flora had conducted herself most decorously during the trying scene she had to go through. Her first prayer, when seated alone in the drawing-room, just before Mr. Ochter entered, was that her good aunt might keep away. "I am sure he would have asked

me long ago," thought Flora, "if she had not persisted in remaining; I almost think she did it on purpose:" and she placed herself in a good light, with a music-book on her knee, from which she looked up with an air of sweet surprise and a coy simper, as Ochter entered the room. The light fell upon her yellow hair, producing a decided golden tinge; her white taper fingers were well set off by the dusky cover of the book they rested upon; she thought she must look to advantage, and so she did. Mr. Ochter blushed somewhat, for he felt nervous, poor fellow, and as if he was ashamed of himself. He knocked down a chair, grasped his hat firmly, and began to talk, like an honest Englishman as he was, of the weather. The maiden bore with him patiently; his look had convinced her, as well as other little symptoms only discernible by young ladies in similar cases, that his heart was in his mouth, and was to be offered to her in due time; she only hoped he would not be long in offering it.

"I cannot call the weather unpleasant just now," she said; "but I am quite frightened to think what the hot weather must be."

"I will give him a chance now," thought Flora, and she said, casting down her eyes, and with a slightly saddened tone,—

"I am going back to Nakpore immediately. I have had a letter from mamma this morning" (oh! Flora, how could you!) "begging me to return as soon as possible."

Mr. Henry Lony Ochter felt a strange sensation in his throat, akin to strangling; his face felt as if a red-hot poker was held close to it; he gazed at her in silence for a few seconds, and said, at last, in a trembling voice, the tone of which struck even himself as something quite different from ordinary,—

"I am very sorry you are going so soon."

"Dear me, is that all?" thought Flora, who had flattered herself that a burst of passionate love was coming, like a rush of water from a shower-bath.

However, the altered sound of his voice surprised her, and she looked up suddenly; her cold blue eyes, possibly brighter for the occasion, met his, and then the lids dropped again. "It must come now," she thought, "or never," and deemed it advisable to say nothing. She sat in silence, her frame trembling

ever so little, and a rosy flush stealing over her neck and face. She may have felt a little moved, but very, very little.

But poor Ochter was in the seventh heaven of hope and anxiety; he saw the last-mentioned indications of reciprocity: they encouraged him to go on; and incoherent though he was, he managed to utter something, goodness only knows what, but equivalent to "Will you take me?"

Flora, whose soul was satisfied at last, though cool as an ice-box, thought, very properly, that the occasion demanded some demonstration of sensibility on her part. Ought she to faint, or burst into tears, or rush out of the room, or ask him to leave her? Something in this line she knew to be correct, but scarcely understood how to bring it into action. Ochter sprang up, advanced towards her, took her hand, which was not held back, but quivered gracefully, and felt the proudest and happiest man in the world. He needed no words of hers to assure him that she was his.

"I think papa ought to know first," said Flora, making a feint to withdraw her hand; and at the

same time dropping a tear on the sleeve of Mr. Henry Lony Ochter's best morning coat.

Where the tear came from, or why it came just then, it is not easy to say; at all events, the sight of it sent a thrill of happiness through the genuine lover's heart. How was he to know that there are such things as mock tears, capable of being shed at will?

This one tear-drop,—to him how precious a gem it was at that moment! but to a man who has seen them shed by pailfuls, by silly hysterical women for the most trivial and childish of causes, how contemptible would this tiny “*lachryma pullaris*” appear! After all, the most pathetic and poetical varieties of tears are but a little salt and water; and if Mr. Ochter was satisfied with the one Flora bestowed upon him as a proof of her love, it is no business of mine to find fault with it. It was in his eyes a genuine love-drop, fresh from the fount; his halcyon sensations were marred by no suspicion that it might be a counterfeit, distilled for the occasion. Flora's feelings were too intense to allow of her speaking her thoughts; but here was a guarantee which

nobody could question. After a few more ecstatic moments of silence on the lady's part, and vain attempts to express his delight and joy on the gentleman's, she gently withdrew her hand, and said, with exquisite simplicity,—

“May I go now?”

Her colour had gone again; she looked pale and faint, and Lony Ochter, concluding that the scene had been too much for her fragile organization, could not well attempt to detain her. He asked,—

“May I not see you again before you go?”

Flora answered him in the lowly tone of one who has no idea of a will of her own,—

“Ask my aunt, please,” and she glided from the room like a summer shadow, smiling to him a sweet farewell.

Lony Ochter's first feeling after she left him, was one of thankfulness that his crisis had passed favourably. All his anxieties and doubts were gone, to trouble him no more; he had won the object of his first real love, and his future life shone bright before him. He was not one of those miserable thinking men who purposely set themselves to dis-

cover the *aliquid amari* in their cup of joy before tasting it, who firmly believe that every rose has its thorn, and who would be rather mortified than otherwise if they were to pluck one without being scratched. Did he torture himself with reflections upon the way Flora received his declaration, with doubts as to whether she displayed as true, as real a love for him, as his for her? Did he ponder upon any coldness and formality in her manner? Did it occur to him that she seemed to consider the thing a bore, to be got over as soon as possible? No! Thanks to his happy, sanguine temperament, not a shadow of the sort crossed him—all was sunshine. When he had time to reflect what he ought to do next, how to make the matter known to Colonel Armit appeared to him a little difficulty. It was really no difficulty at all, but it was a sort of satisfaction to him to think so.

Mrs. Skewbald, after arranging this with him, looked into the office where the major had just affixed his signature to the return we left him puzzling over, having entirely failed in discovering what it meant.

"Well?" he said.

"She has hooked him, of course. He has just left. She told him she was going home to-night."

"She might have told us, I think, too. Don't try to stop her—mind that!" said the major, firmly. "You see her now, and lay her dawk."

"Very well," Mrs. Skewbald replied; "I promised him to write to my brother to announce it. He appears to be ashamed to do it himself."

"You can if you like; but I don't see why he shouldn't do it. There! go and see what the girl means to do."

Mrs. Skewbald, released, went to look after her niece. Flora was seated at her desk, cool and fresh-looking, writing a note.

"Oh, aunt, I suppose you know?"

"Yes, my dear!" and Mrs. Skewbald embraced her lovingly.

"Could I go away to-night? I am so anxious to be at home again."

"Of course, dear! your dawk can be laid immediately, if you must run away from us so soon."

“It isn’t that, indeed, but——”

“Well, I will speak to your uncle at once.”

Mrs. Skewbald hung about her niece’s room for a few minutes, in the hope that, like most other young ladies craving for sympathy at all times, she would give her the history of Mr. Lony Ochter’s declaration—a matter of absorbing interest to ladies of all ages; but Flora was peculiarly reticent, and would talk of nothing but palkee-bearers. Mrs. Skewbald had to go away hungering.

“Artful thing!” the disappointed lady muttered; “this is my return for finding a husband for her.”

Flora, however, had a long communication ready for the evening’s post, addressed, as was meet and fit, to Mrs. Armit, Nakpore, and containing, no doubt, all the particulars Mrs. Skewbald considered herself entitled to hear. This letter reached its destination very shortly before Flora, who did succeed in getting away that same night.

Through some mismanagement poor Lony Ochter did not hear of her flight until an hour after she started. The moment it came to his ears, he ordered his best horse, thrust a small packet into his pocket,

and galloped furiously off on the Nakpore road. He easily overtook the palkee, and galloped up to its side. Flora screamed a little affectedly; he spoke a few hurried words, and asked her to keep the aforesaid parcel, which he dropped into her hand, until they met again. He then ventured to say something ending with "darling," and disappeared into the darkness.

"Feels like a bracelet," said Flora; "I hope it is not anything bought by himself, so few men have any taste or any idea what becomes one."

She put it carefully under her pillow until the next morning's light should enable her to decide upon its merits, and went quietly to sleep, not being in the least inconvenienced, as one would fancy she ought to have been, by the dust, or the chatter of the bearers, or the glare of their stinking torch, or by the remembrance that she had that day pledged herself "for better for worse" to one she did not care a—but this last is no affair of ours.

There are some women all heart and love—angels clad in earthly garb—beings who never know a selfish thought, lent to wretched man by Heaven to

prove to him the reality of perfection ; but there are as certainly others, cold, and vain, and heartless, so devoted to love of themselves that they have none to spare, even for their children.

Blanks, such as these latter, must be drawn in the matrimonial lottery sometimes. Let the victims have all our sympathy.

CHAPTER VIII.

GAUDEAMUS IGITUR.

My readers will easily understand that Mr. Henry Lony Ochter was not the kind of man to enjoy his happiness all alone. He could not, like a cat with a lump of valerian root, hug and gloat over his great joy in solitude. His mother's letter was lying on the table when he got home; he tore it up nervously, the only one of hers he had so treated, and he resolved not to write at all to Beauclerc Cottage. Here was an *aliquid amari* for him already! How happy he would have been to sit down and pour the whole story into his mother's ears, if she had not closed them beforehand, to tell her what a gentle, loveable heart he had won, how certain he felt that he should be the happiest of husbands, how satisfied he was that his sisters would love their new sister!

But now he could do nothing ; he had been stabbed in the dark, condemned unheard on the statement of some mischief-maker, and things must be left to right themselves.

After his gallop to catch up Flora, with the intent made known in the last chapter, he got home as the second bugle for the Buffadar mess sounded ; he resolved to go and dine there, as he had not "put in an appearance" for some time. He was welcomed with a shout, and a series of violent hand-shakings, which proved to him incontestably that the "murder was out" already. In the forenoon it was known to but four people, none of whom had any particular interest in circulating the intelligence ; yet now every one in Chillumpore knew, not only that Mr. Henry Lony Ochter was engaged to Miss Flora Armit, but that the day was fixed, the licence written for, the bridal banquet ordered, &c. &c., though the principals had not yet come down to these details. His senior, Mr. Ulney, had heard it, and was more savage than usual in consequence that evening ; and the letter he concocted for his wife's benefit by the next mail, on the grievance of her constant sickness before men-

tioned, was a composition in the invective line worthy of Junius. The Kookries had heard it too, and Mrs. Kookrie wished very much she had not written to Mr. Ochter's mother: that lady had not acknowledged her letter either, which was a bad sign. All the Buffadar officers heard it, and were having a warm conversation upon the credit due to old Skew for her successful trapping, when the snared one himself entered the mess-room. The good-natured fellows pretended to make him out the most enviable of men. After a few feeble attempts to resist the current, he ceased to disclaim the good fortune they loudly congratulated him upon. Soup off the table, he said,—

“Gentlemen, what shall it be? We must have a night of it. No parade, or any confounded bore of that sort to-morrow morning, is there? Simkin is the correct tippie. Does any one know anything better?”

Nobody knew anything better, of course; but the brave Buffadars would not hear of Ochter's “standing” it, as he wanted to. He was to be their guest that evening. Wine-glasses were ordered off

the table, so was a bottle or two of that "vile Salernum" sherry; the foaming Falernian, or such an approach to it as can be procured in India, sparkled in plebeian "tumblers," from which alone the Buffadars held that the divine fluid tasted properly. A high degree of jellity prevailed. Even cross old Sarruk, who was glum for the first quarter of an hour at the thought of the share of the expense he would have to bear, brightened up, and commenced his interminable narrative of the share he took in the famous Begarree campaign, to which nobody paid the least attention. Burton, obliged by the rules of hospitality to abandon his brandy-and-water, the only safe drink he knew of, became, before the curry came round, a victim to the deplorable mistake of mixing his liquors. He bore up for a time, silently stooping over the plate, upon which his knife and fork scratched and clashed helplessly against each other, his fingers having just power enough to retain without guiding them.

"Burton, my boy! here's to you," some one shouted.

He heard, but heeded not; he raised his head

slowly, and looked vaguely across the table, with an agony depicted upon his poor battered face equal to Guido's San Sabastian.

"Know I'm screwed, you know," he mumbled; "don't want e-hu to tell me that: knowt very well. But I'm not drunk—not so easy to make me drunk. Oblige me keeping osservations to yourself, you know; wouldn't let me alone—mus drink simken—dam hard lines!"

Having thus delivered himself with difficulty, he sank back in his chair, dozed for a little, and shortly after disappeared, not under the table. He was removed by some mysterious agency with the second course, and came in again with the grilled bones, at 1 A.M., lively as a lark. None of the others came to early grief, as he did. They all liked their liquor as a social institution; but there was not a man amongst them who would sit down alone to a solitary bottle and drink for the love of it. In this latter consists the vice of drunkenness, for which there is no defence.

In what more melancholy, more depressing state, can one pass his evening hours than at a strictly

decorous mess-table? A mess without a due proportion of the convivial element does not deserve the name; it rather resembles a dining tavern to which each man goes, fills himself with food, drinks from his own particular bottle, and then hurries away. But in the writer's younger days, you were always certain of a welcome and some happy "laughing hours" in the mess, which was fortunate enough to possess amongst its members a few of those reckless youngsters whose worst characteristics are above depicted. While if you venture into the virtuous mess-room, you find yourself received with a cold stare, studiously ignored by everybody except your entertainer, who shyly opens a bottle of hock or champagne, which you both swallow as quietly as possible: while the others glower at your superior liquor from behind their measures of humble beer. Are not you delighted to rush away the moment the cloth is off the table?

Alcoholic compounds, be they ever so poisonous, are essential to Anglo-Saxon society. We are naturally a melancholic people; without some such artificial aid, sociality would be unknown amongst us; and the

evil of occasional excess is more than counterbalanced by the blessings, however temporary, of cheerfulness, generosity, and good-will to our neighbour, which Bacchus confers upon us, and which, without his help, would be rather exceptional virtues amongst us.

Lony Ochter's betrothal-night was properly celebrated at the wing mess. The writer of this chronicle need not tell how his health was proposed, or how hilariously it was received—how everybody made a speech or sang a song suitable to the occasion; nor need he enumerate the quantity of long-necked, tin-crowned bottles, which lay, like dead men, on the floor, the heaps of devilled biscuits, or anchovy toast, which kept the compounders thereof hard at work until the grilled-bone stage came, or the friendly rows which occurred, and which were lovingly made up. Passing hurriedly over all these, he does not blush to record, that at the witching hour when the morning star begins to blaze, his hero, Mr. Henry Lony Ochter, was huddled into a buggy, and, the syce leading his horse, was carried off and deposited in his bungalow in a state of unconsciousness, worthy of the festive fact he had been celebrating. The

writer wishes it, too, to be clearly understood, that because Mr. Henry Lony Ochter ended the eventful day under these apparently pitiable circumstances, he does not intend his readers to think the worse of him. To celebrate one's good fortune *cum sacra vite*, is a good old custom, handed down to us, like health-drinking, hand-shaking, and dancing, from our barbarous Sandwich Islander days, and it is deserving of equal respect. How is a man, when rejoicing over the fact which is to make his whole existence happy, to be expected to measure the exact number of goblets he can safely empty? It is, the writer considers, quite in keeping with the happy, care-banishing, friend-loving, impulsive disposition, which Lony Ochter possessed, that on this night he should not think of restraint or caution; and if he did become reduced to the sad pass of being unable to drive himself home, it is but a misfortune, which many men subject themselves to on much more trivial pretexts than he.

CHAPTER IX.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD.

It fortunately happened that Flora Armit left Napore before her charms had made any indelible impression upon the hearts of those officers of her good father's regiment who were to some extent smitten, as has been already mentioned. As, in photography, a picture requires a certain amount of "exposure" before it can be perfected, so the love process, in most cases, cannot go on if, during the early stages, the object is removed. Love at first sight certainly resembles "the instantaneous process:" one glimpse, and the picture or heart is taken, and "fixed" for ever; but then love at first sight is as rare, as antipathy at first sight is common. Neither Howard, the serious captain of the Foujdars, nor the younger lads who felt desperate when Flora

departed to visit her aunt at Chillumpore, felt at all exultant or joyful when they heard of her approaching return. Their respective flames had gone out for want of fuel.

It would be foolish to say that they could not all be blown up again in a very short time if needful, but then, after a month or six weeks, they were far from being in that love-stricken state in which the gentle charmer left them. They received a fair amount of "chaff," under which their ardent ideas were easily smothered. They heard nothing of the maiden. They noticed that kind Mrs. Armit rather preferred not to hear even the ordinary polite inquiries made for her daughter. The young lady became a standing toast, and consequently a standing joke, in the Fouj mess. Under all these circumstances, when it was circulated that she was to return immediately, they heard it with composure; and resolved, possibly, not to singe their wings again. The colonel heard with much delight of Flora's sudden return; but when he heard also, as Mrs. Armit made no effort to conceal from him now, that Flora, during her short absence, had con-

ditionally accepted the offer of marriage made her, he felt actually wrathful. He could not disguise his irritation from his wife, who made vain attempts to explain to him that Flora could not have done better than lose her heart so advantageously.

"Of course, it was quite right that she should marry some time."

"He never expected," in answer to an indignant question from his wife whether he wanted Flora to live and die an old maid, "that she should not do in due time as most girls did; but that without consulting them, after scarcely a month's acquaintance, she should pledge herself to the first young whipper-snapper of a civilian who offered himself, was more than he could understand. He really thought the girl had more sense," said the extremely simple old gentleman.

He was jealous of his daughter's affection, and had some old-fashioned ideas of his claim as a parent upon it. He never sat down patiently to consider that it was possible that a son or daughter, separated during the long period intervening between childhood and man- or woman- hood, from father and

mother, might never have learned to feel the genuine filial affection for either, which home-bred children almost invariably possess.

It was no great fault of poor Flora's that she thought first for herself. Many years of monotonous, vacationless school life, lit up by no home memory, must make a child selfish and hard. During all the earlier part of her life she had to struggle for herself. No mother was by to lighten her school-room sorrows; such mighty woes they are too, for are they not remembered ever after? No one, whose memory is not defective, will assert that his school-days are the happiest of his existence.

Flora, whose mental organization was not very fine, joined her parents, to find them a very prosy, tedious old couple, not to her taste at all; and she made an early resolution to lay hold of the first opportunity of setting up for herself. Her father thought that his gentle Flora's heart had been stolen by some designing person; that she was a simple and susceptible girl, wheedled into an engagement by a well-managed love-speech or two. Happier, poor man, was he in fancying this,

than if he had any inkling of the true state of affairs.

"No, James, I cannot think that Flora has acted at all imprudently. She has given him to understand that your consent is the chief thing. Charlotte says that she never met a more pleasing young man than Mr. Ochter. If she had promised to marry a lieutenant in the Buffadars, of whom we hear those shocking stories, you would have just cause to complain."

"This is all very true, my dear; of course it might have been worse," the colonel answered, testily; "but when this Mr. Ochter commenced paying her attention, she might very easily have written to you or to me, and asked our advice. I have no confidence in Charlotte, or her skin-flint husband. I am sorry I ever let her go there."

Mrs. Armit was delighted at the prospective connection; but she allowed herself, as a diplomatic manoeuvre, to be apparently persuaded by her husband that Flora had acted rashly. As soon as he found that she agreed perfectly with him, his irritation was gradually appeased. He made a stern

resolution to exert, if necessary, the paternal prerogative, and to reject the guilty Ochter, if found wanting; at which arrangement of his, his better half laughed inwardly.

No man was more gently ruled than was our good colonel by his wife. With a true respect for his dignity, no act or word of hers ever caused it to be said that Mrs. Armit commanded the Foujdars. To be "henpecked," according to the common belief, is the most humiliating misfortune that can befall a man. The writer, on the contrary, believes, that no man is happier, as a domestic animal, than he who is skilfully guided by his wife *in omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*. According to his idea, the really henpecked husband is one whom his wife delights in triumphing over in public: the genuine henpecking uxor is one who rules his diet at dinner, if he is at all dyspeptic; who orders him to come home when she thinks him at the height of his enjoyment; who snubs his particular friends if he dares to bring them to his house uninvited by her; who reads all his letters first, and dictates the answers; who hurries him about

as she would not venture to do by a servant, male or female, in England. A husband so managed one sees now and then; but such a pitiful object differs completely and altogether from the kind of husband the author admires and envies, to whom the coarse term "henpecked" is by no means applicable. The skilfully guided husband lives many happy years under the pleasant delusion that he is his own master; he fancies that he has a really obedient, submissive wife; and great is his compassion for his friend Jones, "who daren't open his mouth, sir." He glories in his independence, and thinks he does exactly what he likes; the true state of the case being that the good fellow has not had a will of his own for years. He thinks that he "consults" his wife, when he really asks her to speak her commands to her slave. She never allows him to feel the bit, but it is, for all that, never out of his mouth. The collar is never off his neck, yet she takes care that it never galls him. The writer's sincere belief is that the happiest husband belongs to this class of men: of whom good Colonel Armit is a fair specimen.

Not to her dearest female friend would Mrs. Armit confide that her husband was a cypher; and so far from allowing her influence over him to be even guessed by anybody, nothing did she keep more carefully concealed. Even in her conversation with her daughter, the colonel was invariably represented as supreme—his word was law; but this wise young female was not two days in the house before she discovered that her mother bore the sceptre.

It did not once occur to Flora, as she drew near Nampore, that her movement could have caused her father any displeasure. Poor girl! the idea that she should marry with as little delay as possible, that she should secure an establishment as soon as practicable, was the main one in her pretty head; and she expected no end of congratulations from both father and mother for having done so well. The former had driven out to meet her, and, though he had been well schooled by Mrs. A., Flora detected a shade of coldness in his manner as he kissed her, and seated her beside him. He felt strongly tempted to begin at once to dilate upon the imprudence of

love-engagements hastily contracted; but the conjugal influence fortunately prevented him. Flora began to talk very volubly upon other subjects; and they chatted together as they drove along, so gaily that the good colonel forgot for the time being that they were to separate soon again, and that he would then become virtually childless.

Within a few miles of Nakpore, Mrs. Armit met them in her carriage, and claimed her daughter for the remainder of the journey. Flora could notice no coldness in her mother's embrace. The good lady made no attempt to conceal her delight. Flora painted her future husband in the most glowing terms: not even her mother could detect any flaw in the story of the love she represented herself as being filled with for "dear Henry." She felt certain, too, that she possessed all his heart, and she was "so happy." All Mrs. Armit's fondest wishes had been fulfilled; and, ever so much happier than her daughter, she proceeded at once to the discussion of the delightful details of the coming event; which minor matters, as a general rule, receive more attention from womankind than the grand fact itself.

Not many days after Flora's return, the colonel was quite reconciled—such is the wondrous influence of civilized women's tactics—to the union of the houses of Armit and Ochter. The representative of the latter discovered most opportunely an old friend of his at Nakpore, and invited himself over for a few days' pig-sticking. He stayed ten days, but never a spear touched he. He ingratiated himself very successfully with Colonel Armit, who found out that he had known poor deceased Ochter senior many years ago. It was resolved that the marriage ought to take place before the hot weather set in. There were no lawyers to delay it, no settlements to be drawn out. Ochter must not be absent long from his work.

The only difficulty was in the important matter of bridesmaids. Flora hinted once to her future *sposo* that he ought to be able to furnish three; he frowned slightly, and murmured something about a long journey for them. She thought it strange that he never alluded to his own relatives while the brief preliminaries were being arranged; but she prudently reflected that there would be plenty

of time to inquire into this afterwards. The fact was, that Lony Ochter received, in due course, the second letter, retracting the first, which Mr. Gregorian had advised his mother to write; it only increased his indignation. He never acknowledged either, and banished Beauclerc Cottage from his thoughts. Beauclerc Cottage, believing that it had done its duty, did not appeal to him again. The writer can afford space for only the following particulars of the consummation, which were all Beauclerc Cottage received, and over which Beauclerc Cottage wept plentifully:—

“ At Nakpore, on —th March, 18—, by the Reverend Elias Buckwell, Flora, only surviving daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel James Armit, Commanding Foujdars, to Henry Lony Ochter, Esq., B.C.S.”

CHAPTER X.

A THING OF BEAUTY IS A JOY FOR EVER.

WHAT more refreshing and varied honeymoon trip can be devised than a tour from dawk bungalow to dawk bungalow? Its lively and exhilarating character must be familiar to many of my readers, who will not be much surprised to learn that, before half the *premier mois* had expended itself, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lony Ochter decided that what between dust, tinned meats, grilled fowls, no vegetables, no furniture, no servants, and excessive dust, their honey had become somewhat treacly, and that it would be advisable to brave the world and return to Chillumpore.

When the knot was tied, kind Mrs. Armit deserted her husband for a short time, went to Chillumpore, took Mr. Ochter's house in hand, and soon made it a respectable receptacle for the young people. When

they arrived, Lony Ochter, who had been making himself miserable with the thought of the petty discomforts his young wife would have to endure while they were making the house habitable, could scarcely believe his eyes. All had been done by his amiable mother-in-law. Furniture, crockery, the thousand and one essentials of happy domestic life which his dwelling had been previously without, and which he had sorely puzzled himself about procuring, to say nothing of paying for, were provided, looking as much at home as if the house had been under lady control for years. He could only express his thanks incoherently ; but he felt happier at the moment this best of ladies was leading him from room to room, than he certainly had been for the last week of his bridal tour. Even his bygone bachelor feelings were respected ; in one room she had put his foils, and masks, and pipes, and cheroot-boxes, and boxing-gloves, jockey caps, whips, and decidedly bachelor-coloured prints which had been found by her, scattered over the house in all directions. Here they were, all at hand, if he could care for such *impedimenta* again.

After hastily introducing them to their house, Mrs. Armit announced her intention of returning directly to Nakpore. The colonel had been on the loose ever since she left him. He had taken to dining at mess and smoking cheroots, and playing whist to all hours of the night. He ought to have been ashamed of himself; but he was not in the least, and she did not know what he might not do next if she did not return immediately. No! She had not put up with the Skewbalds; they asked her of course, but their house was rather far, and she had lived by herself in her son-in-law's house while setting it up. Everything was now in pretty good order, except that the poultry houses were not quite stocked,—so difficult to get things at Chillumpore. However, she would supply the deficiency from her own as soon as she got home. And so the good lady, deaf to all entreaties not to run away so soon, but with eyes full of tears, caused herself to be borne away *en route* to Nakpore.

The mother-in-law of India, that is, the Englishman in India's mother-in-law, is not often the formidable obstacle to young married people's happiness

she is represented to be in England. She is never known to interfere in the housekeeping, she does not often appear as a prominent member of the family. Does she ever sit at the bottom of the table, give her helpless son- or daughter-in-law's servants "warning," fix the hours for meals, take the management of the nursery, dose the tender babe with Daffy or Gregory? The writer proclaims his ignorance; the subject requires to be investigated. If it should turn out, after due inquiry, that, whether from the rarity of mothers-in-law or the difficulties of travelling, or the entirely different system of life we lead, or from whatsoever cause arising, this well-picked bone of contention and unholy strife seldom or never falls in the path of newly joined Baucises and Philemons in India, let the incalculable boon be well considered by those who are ever grumbling about such trifles as heat, and dust, and cholera. Ask some miserable wight at home, whose wife's mother has been in the house for the last thirteen months, to the irreparable ruin of his connubial happiness, whether he would not, if he could, gladly fly to a land teeming with many disagreeables to be sure, yet

where mothers-in-law are comparatively unknown? Would he not answer passionately, "Anywhere, anywhere, even Avernus itself, if I can only be secure from old Mrs. Thigsby!" The writer believes that the country would become a great deal more popular if it were only widely made known, that the mother-in-law—the real social evil—is rarely to be found in it.

One of the first peculiarities Lony Ochter began to notice in himself after his marriage was, that he constantly caught himself thinking about money matters; which he little thought of before, except when brought before him by a letter or some such reminder. He was not really dipped to any serious extent; he owed a good deal to Calcutta tradesmen, but they must wait. The handsome front of the Meehurbanee Bank was constantly rising up before his mind's eye of late; the manager had become very troublesome; he would insist upon his not allowing the instalments and interest of his loan to fall into arrears, as they had a most decided tendency to do. "D—n his cheeky letters," poor Lony Ochter would groan; yet he felt he could

not but obey them. His partnership in the training-stable was still kept up; the confederates wrote to him most cheerfully about the haul they were sanguine of making at the Chandneypore Grand Metropolitan. Yet there, too, supplies were pretty regularly called for, to say nothing of a serious call they had made upon him for his quota of the cost of a new thorough-bred which they had purchased, to fill up the place of one that had "gone out" suddenly. Then he must buy a carriage and a pair of horses for Mrs. Ochter,—he could not think of asking her to submit to the degradation of a buggy.

As we have learnt, generous Mrs. Armit had relieved him of no small load by taking the setting up and furnishing responsibilities upon herself; but then the other loads were heavy enough for a young fellow, quite junior in the service, and drawing little more than twice the pay of a subaltern.

No care about money matters troubled his bride; she had arranged the pattern of the plate they were to order at once from Calcutta, as it would take such

an awful time to come from England. There was a number of minor articles, such as drawing-room clocks, French vases, table ornaments, and so forth, which must be ordered at once, too. Poor Ochter had not the courage to say, "No, my dear! I can't afford it;" or, perhaps, he would not distress the dear girl for the world; so he sat in silence, or trying to smile approval, while she made out her list of necessaries, rather alarmed at heart, though, all the time.

A very few days after their marriage, his young wife had inquired closely into the cause of his silence with regard to his mother and sisters. He told her enough to let her understand generally how they had offended him; but she declined to see any cause for offence. It would not suit her at all that there should be any coldness in that quarter. People having a nice house in the Hills, and reputed to be wealthy, she could not afford but to be on the best possible terms with. She upbraided her Henry gently, for not having at least written to his mother on so important an occasion as their marriage, and she gave him no peace in her own delightfully winning way,

until he had despatched a missive of peace to Beauclerc Cottage, part of which was dictated by herself. Lony Ochter was not a very ready letter-writer, but Flora was, and he thought it then extremely pleasant that she should lighten his labours. So the letter was written, and produced quite as good an effect upon the Paharnauth relatives as Flora hoped.

By return of post, letters came from every member of the household there to the forgiving Henry, and one breathing the greatest affection from the *mère* to her new daughter; rather a different style of composition from that in which she first gave her son a "piece of her mind" after Mrs. Kookrie's interference. The last injured lady wrote more than once to her dearest Mrs. Ochter, who had been always so kind to her, begging of her to send her even a line. But Mrs. Ochter was stern: the Kookries had fallen from her regard for ever. Mrs. Kookrie felt that Mrs. Ochter must hate her, and she decided that the only way to be restored to her graces was through Mrs. Ochter junior; who was now a very different character indeed from the designing Flora she had

watched one evening flirting with poor Captain Stapleton, and against whom she had warned Mrs. Ochter senior, actuated by the kindest motives towards her son. Now that all was over, Lony Ochter was pleased to think that his mother and he were on good terms again; he was not in the least mercenary, or he might have thought that he could not afford to fall out with that comfortably situated lady. At the time my tale opens, he and his wife had been settled about a month in Chillumpore. They had got on very comfortably so far.

The writer must express in this place the feeling of profound pity with which he has often pondered upon the condition of young married couples in India, shut up in a house by themselves all day long. Why they don't bore each other out of existence in a few weeks, he is totally unable to explain. How do they manage to get through the long wearying hours of the hot-weather days? He is now referring to military folk, say a sub or a captain, who, after a short parade in the morning, has no occupation of any sort for the remainder of the twenty-four hours. Supposing him married, he is conscientiously bound to stay at home

to keep company with his wife ; he cannot, like the single man, rush off to the mess and solace himself with billiards or whist. He certainly does not study, nor, over one man in a thousand, occupy himself with any particular accomplishment. What does his poor wife do ? Like her husband, she has nothing to do, and does it. After mature consideration, the writer has come to the conclusion that mother Nature interferes, and endows the sufferers with a capacity for sleep far beyond the measure allotted to others. He believes that they sleep all day, waking up at meal-times ; having fed, they go to sleep again. There is no possible remedy for them but this ; without it they must infallibly *ennuyer* each other to death. If they could separate for even a limited portion of the day, their situation might not be so deplorable ; but, each knowing well that the other has nought whatever to do, such a breach of marriage unity could not be tolerated. The only rational excuse they could bring forward for ceasing to make each other miserable is sleep, and this, the writer repeats, nature allows them to indulge in without stint. Civilians have a very great advantage in this respect : they must be away

for a certain number of hours every day; and extremely grateful they ought to be for being rescued from the great misfortune of having nothing to do in a country where, without some useful employment, men and women must retrograde.

Lony Ochter soon began to see his way through the intricacies of his duties, and the good fellow laboured with a zest he had never known before. The thorns began, however, to grow, and make themselves felt. He endeavoured to ignore their existence, to shut out his perception of them even from himself; but there they were, entering his flesh with a most minute prod, and rankling within him. It is hard to have to announce this of one so supremely happy only a few weeks before; and it will not be easy to bring clearly before the sympathizing reader the exact source of his petty troubles. Flora's beauty had, it need not be said, lost nothing; they had not the slightest approach to a disagreement upon any subject; she was not a very demonstrative person at any time, and he could complain of no change in her manner in this respect. Where, then, did the source of his uneasiness lie? This is not a

question our warm-hearted, impulsive, by no means reflective hero ever thought of asking himself. The cloud that gathered on his open brow now and then he was completely unconscious of, and though he felt a chill of disappointment, arising from a half-formed idea that he had not nearly attained the felicity he expected, not even the vigilant Flora could observe, in his manner to her, that he suffered from such at times. One source was, perhaps, what occurred between them when his young wife understood, as she soon did, that he was embarrassed rather seriously in proportion to his income. She endeavoured to make his circumstances look less gloomy than they actually were; but she did not say, as he fondly hoped she would, that the carriage he was about to order, or the plate, or the expensive nicknacks, might be done without very well for a time. Not a word of this: she recommended him to reduce his stable, to give up smoking cheroots, and, above all, to withdraw from the Calcutta confederacy (which he could not possibly do just then); at the same time every day's post bore off orders for jewellery and dress, and female frippery of every

description, without which she found it impossible to exist. Flora was, it must be written, selfish and vain beyond the average of her sex ; and a thoroughly selfish woman (thanks to Providence, a most uncommon freak of nature) is many degrees worse than a thoroughly selfish man (by no means an uncommon product). Is it to be wondered, when our poor Lony Ochter saw all this, that he began to tremble for the genuineness of the jewel he had won?

One other source of disappointment, if not of a more unpleasant sensation, was the notion, which grew fast every day, that his young wife was livelier, in more joyous spirits, apparently more anxious to please, when surrounded by others, than she was when alone with him. He marvelled how little they had to say to each other in their own house, and how talkative and cheerful she became when comparative strangers joined them. . Once or twice already, when detained late at Cutcherry, he found on reaching home that his wife had already gone out to the "gardens" (as a few badly kept walks in an enclosure were called, by the sides of which some pomegranate and orange bushes grew

in a three-quarters wild state, and to which the white population of Chillumpore resorted to meet each other). He galloped down there after her, and found her talking earnestly, as the poor dear fellow thought, to Stapleton, as she leant over the buggy's side, and looking, as he believed, very different from the silent, almost subdued person he had parted from in the morning, at their somewhat dreary breakfast table. What a pang the first glance at the talking pair gave him! He crushed it for the time; but that night, when smoking the weed of peace in the verandah (for tobacco had been banished from the house), it rose up and smote him again. What boots it that Captain Stapleton and Mrs. Ochter were at that time discussing poor Mrs. Kookrie's desperate bonnet, or Mrs. Tarbund's complexion? How was our poor hero to know this? All he felt at the moment was, that his wife appeared warmer in her manner with the dangerous captain than she ever was with him of late; and is not such a feeling enough to make a young sensitive husband somewhat unhappy? He could not but remember with a shudder, that before his marriage the same

pair had made him wretched in those same gardens ; and here was a return of the wretchedness !

A very wide line of demarcation exists, be it remembered, between that delicious conjunction of ideas grouped under the generic title Jealousy, and the blankness of heart which Lony Ochter felt scarcely more than a month after his marriage. The former is a full-grown toad ; the latter a mere tadpole, far removed, yet still akin ; wriggling about in a most lively manner, possessing great vitality and power of growth, and certain to become highly venomous some day, if only permitted to exist. Such, then, was the state of our hero's mind ; not really unhappy, yet not happy either. His case, no doubt, is peculiar and uncommon.

"Where have you been, dear?" asked Flora, languidly, when she joined her husband in the verandah on the morning on which our present story opened. "What a bad cigar that is ! my head aches already from it."

"Easily cured, Flo !" he replied, lighting another. "Now are you better?"

"A little."

But a few moments afterwards the second was

found to be quite as bad as the first, and Lony Ochter did not venture to light a third. The wife who makes a dead set against her husband's innocent weaknesses is imprudent, if not worse. The happiest and most hospitable house is that in which Corydon, if so disposed, has his cheroot encouraged rather than repressed. Smoking is quite a domestic virtue in India, and sensible wives know it.

Flora's style of beauty was not of that order which looks to advantage in *déshabille*. "Simplex munditiis," was by no means her motto. In a morning wrapper, her hair looked rusty, her eyes red and fishy, her teeth far from brilliant, and her figure no figure at all. When got up to be looked at, her appearance was quite imposing, as has been before insisted upon; but really, when she emerged in the morning, to be seen only by her husband, the falling off was somewhat startling. The true test for a woman's loveliness is the effect she produces when dressed in a yellow gingham wrapper; but if judged by this standard, Flora would be pronounced plain. Many a man who loses his heart in a ball-room to some beautiful being, would

recover it sharp, if he were only to get a glimpse of her in curl-papers, and when uncorseted. One often hears some shallow-minded talker—probably a wretched husband with economical views—launch forth into an invective against the extravagance of women in the matter of dress. He little knows their wisdom. They love dress not for itself, not out of vanity, but simply because by its potent agency they are enabled to look well; and that it is woman's mission in our civilized age to look well, no one, it is to be hoped, will attempt to dispute,—or to maintain that without varied and expensive dress an average lady can show to advantage. A husband should pay nothing so cheerfully as the milliner's bill. That much-abused artificer provides far more happiness for him than he ever dreams of. It is solely on his account that the expensive wife runs into the extravagances of which he complains. If he doubts this, let him ask to be allowed to see her but once in some cheap and primitive attire, and he will be silenced for ever.

“Did you ride far?” inquired Flora, after demolishing her husband on the cheroot question.

"Only a mile or two on the cantonment road. I feel very lonely since you gave up your morning rides, Flo!"

"I found them too exhausting, dear; and you know what Dr. Huddee said."

"I don't mind what he said. I am sure nothing would do you so much good as an early gallop," Mr. Ochter replied, firmly.

"He was here yesterday—did I tell you? and he recommended me to go to the Hills for the hot season. I told him, of course, it was out of the question—that I would not on any account leave you."

So spoke Flora, as earnestly and strongly as if she had never dreamt of parting from her husband. Yet she had resolved to go to Paharnauth before the end of the month. Misled, as she intended him to be, by the fervour of her declaration, Lony Ochter answered,—

"Oh, my darling! I would not hear of your staying in the plains a day longer, if the doctor says you ought to go to the Hills. I will see him to-day and ask him."

"Don't, dear, I beg of you! I know the hot weather is not nearly so severe as people say; I am not in the least afraid of it. Besides, I am not really ill—I only feel so tired after making the least exertion;" Flora wound up with a little sigh.

Of course this eager declaration had the desired effect, and Lony Ochter resolved to look Huddee up on his way to Cutcherry.

"Don't let any scruples about the expense stop you, Flo: there would be only the cost of the journey; there's plenty of room for you at Beauclerc Cottage."

"I am sure I should be in the way, dear! I know I should, and I should be so wretched away from you; if you could come also, it would be different."

"Oh! that's quite impossible. I have no chance of getting away; and you would not feel the absence from home for more than a day or two," urged the victimized but anxious husband.

"Let us say no more about it, dear! Nothing would induce me to go. I am not at all ill," Flora replied, with a mock positiveness which she could

afford to display now that her Henry's anxieties were fairly raised. The judicious Dr. Huddee she knew was entirely on her side.

"By the way, dear," said Flora, considering the first question settled and beyond the need of discussion further, "we are going out to dinner on Wednesday next. I quite forgot to mention it to you yesterday evening."

"Not at Ullney's, or with the Skewbalds, I hope?" Lony Ochter inquired.

He had taken an unaccountable antipathy to the gallant major and his lady, which Mrs. Ochter fortunately shared.

"No, dear! with the Kookries," said Flo.

"I can't stand those Kookries. I wish they wouldn't invite people in this way. Why didn't you put them off?"

"I couldn't well, dear, as they met me out driving last night and stopped to ask me. But you will come?"

"There is no help for it, as you have accepted, you know; but dining out is a frightful bore."

"I don't care for it either," said Flora, who did

care more for an evening away from home than she thought advisable to reveal.

Lony Ochter was sincere in his objections. After a day in a crowded and not at all fragrant Cutcherry, with his mind on the stretch (for, though he had little intellect, he had of late devoted all his capacity to his work), to dine quietly at home, and nod in his chair until bedtime, was a way of passing the evening most agreeable to him. Mrs. Ochter slept a good deal during the day, disliked *tête-à-tête* dinners, and was very dull, though wide awake, during the evening. It is no wonder, then, that an evening out, no matter where, had many charms for her.

"Kookrie is a gruff, uncouth sort of fellow—I know him less than any of the others—and Mrs. Kookrie is not a charming style of woman. I had no notion they gave burra khanas," said Lony Ochter, who would have preferred that his wife had asked him before accepting.

Her asking him about anything she had in view was a mere matter of form, but he did not know this yet.

"I have always found Mrs. Kookrie most obliging

and kind, my dear!" Flora answered. "Don't you remember her coming here and staying so obligingly all day when my head was so bad? It was quite an act of charity. I should have been miserable without her."

"I rather think I prefer Mrs. Tarbund, of the two, Flo."

"How can you, dear! Poor Mrs. Tarbund's colour is enough. Her children are so dark, too," said Flora.

It was evident from her tone that Mrs. Tarbund, the *deputy magistrate's* wife, or some such functionary's, was, in Mrs. Ochter's estimation, a lost woman.

"Well, she is a little black, and she does look like a bolster with a string tied round the middle of it," said Mr. Ochter; "but she is a good-natured, honest sort of thing, and she does not pretend to anything. I remember the day I called on her, shortly after I came here first; her little mahogany children were tumbling about the floor. She didn't, like others I know, cry out, 'How sunburnt they are!' or any nonsense of that sort. She said good-humouredly, 'No mistaking that colour, Mr. Ochter.' I rather

like Mrs. Tarbund ever since. Do you know I think your friend Mrs. Kookrie, who is always so hard upon Mrs. T., is a bird of the same colour, for all that? It is an old saying in India, 'that none are so bitter against the native blood as those who have a decided drop or two of it themselves.'"

"Oh, Henry, how can you! Poor Mrs. Kookrie!" said Flora.

"I am only repeating what I heard at the mess," he continued; "that reminds me, we really ought to ask one or two of them to dine some evening. They were always very civil to me. I wish our stores would come!"

"Captain Stapleton told me last night that he intended getting six months' leave and going to Paharnauth for the hot weather," remarked Flora, innocently. "He has some relatives there."

"The deuce he is! I envy him, I must say," Lony Ochter said, endeavouring by the energy of his words to keep off the heart-blankness which he felt as soon as his wife spoke.

"Mrs. Kookrie says he is dreadfully in debt," Flora went on; "and that he lives as extravagantly

as if he had a large private fortune in addition to his pay. He does not appear to have very much sense; and did you notice his bitter way of talking, which makes him so unpleasant at times? I think I like him much less than any of the other officers of the regiment."

Here was Flora's opinion, in plain English, of the man whom he had that strange, distrustful grudge towards. Lony Ochter could not but endeavour to persuade himself of his injustice. The innocent man could not discover, for a long time, that Flora had the same idea of the use of words as the dissolute French philosopher who pronounced "that they were adapted for concealing one's thoughts." Flora had never heard his definition, but she was undoubtedly a clever girl.

Lony Ochter felt brighter, in spite of himself, whenever his wife disparaged Captain Stapleton, as she generally did, and the pleasing effect so produced lasted until he saw them together again.

"Strange you don't hear from your mother, or one of the girls, dear!" Flora said, wishing perhaps to ventilate the Hills question again, or because she

wanted to talk to her husband on some topic which he liked.

"I had a letter last night just before I left Cutcherry. There was nothing in it of importance. Gerty, the youngest, gives me an account of how her dog wanted to bite a Mr. Budlee who was calling with his father at the cottage. This happened ages ago, but she kept it until she felt disposed to write. Louisa is in bad spirits and health—they can't make out why. Esther is causing a great sensation amongst the new arrivals; the Padre, Mr. Gregorian, is paying her a good deal of attention, which my mother does not appear to like. I don't remember anything else worth mentioning in the letter. Each wrote part of it, except poor Loo, without inquiring what the others said."

"Where is the letter, dear? I should so like to read it myself."

"Well, I'm afraid I left it in my desk at Cutcherry last evening."

"Don't forget to send it up to me when you go there, dear."

"All right. Nearly time to dress, isn't it, Flo?"

Flora, it need not be said, had no great curiosity about the Beauclerc cottage letter, but it was a principle of hers from the commencement of her married life, to read all her husband's correspondence; it may be, because she had so few letters of her own.

Flora was not of a confidante or friend-making disposition. She never chose a favourite in her school-days upon whom to lavish affection and vows of eternal fidelity, as most school-girls are represented to be in the habit of doing; and when she grew to the confines of woman's estate, she seldom allowed any one the benefit of her real opinion upon any subject of importance. As far as personal vanity, love of admiration, animosity against rivals, real or fancied, are concerned, Flora was as weak as the weakest of women. All women are, after all, very much on a par in this respect. But Flora possessed a cold, clear discernment of character, great tact, coolness in action, and a power of bearing up and enduring bravely calamities under which most others would sink; all highly valuable qualities. Flora would have made a wretched nurse, an

indifferent mother, as we find her a listless, unloving wife ; and placed as she was, with little prospect of a call being made upon her latent powers, it would have been better, perhaps, had she possessed some of those homely traits which go to make a husband happy. It would have been far better for the man who drew her in the matrimonial lottery, and who deserved better luck.

Next to buying a wife in a bazaar, the Indian system of selecting one in a ball-room or on a Mall stands close as a desperate speculation. No man can be blamed for preferring, like Jack Absolute, that his wife shall have the regulation number of limbs, a limited quantity of back, and more than one eye ; yet no man can be sufficiently blamed for making physical qualifications the sole standard. Nevertheless so much is it the fashion, that even women accept it, and no woman, when she can afford to praise or speak well of others, ever mentions moral qualifications, except when the subject is so plain as to leave no room for praise of any other kind.

There are few who have not known instances of young fellows, not devoid of sense, working themselves

into a state of ridiculous love frenzy about a girl whom they have only met once or twice in public places, with whom they have exchanged no words but a few common polite phrases, and of whom they actually know no more than if she were a figure in a hairdresser's window. Girls are proposed to under those circumstances; they accept, or their friends recommend them to accept, if the man is at all eligible. Married, they sicken of each other after the first month; learn by force of habit to endure each other for the short period of a lifetime; and when the great pacifier, Death, snaps the tie at last, the survivor erects a gorgeous tomb, and inscribes upon it a magniloquent epitaph; while mutual friends talk of their long and happy union, and describe with unction what a happy couple they have been. *Ceteris paribus*, the most pitied man in the world, he who possesses a very plain wife, stands a better chance of domestic happiness and peace of mind than the envied possessor of a Helen or a Juno.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW ARRIVALS.

“Ah, Budlee! how do you do?”

“Hilloa, Russud, you also here! how are you?”

And so, one genial morning in May, on the Rotten Row of Paharnauth, Colonel Budlee met and exchanged greetings with his old intimate acquaintance, Clem Russud, a very senior Civil and Sessions Judge of Teleepore, in the Upper Provinces.

“Why, what brought you to the Hills?”

“My wife, of course: nothing would persuade her but that I wanted change of air. I wanted her to come here alone; but she would not hear of it: so she dragged me off just when the hot winds were beginning to blow deliciously. I know this infernal raw climate will play the deuce with me. I have had a touch of rheumatism already,”—here Mr. Russud rubbed his left elbow tenderly with his right palm—

"and as for the sun, I assure you, before I got under the shade of this hill just now, I felt it as hot as I have ever known it in the plains." Here Mr. Russud took off, and carefully surveyed his head-piece—which was of the shape, colour, and smell of an overgrown toad-stool—in order to ascertain whether there might not be some chink or deficiency in the mass of pith, through which the foe had found its way to his bald cranium. "Great mistake these Hills."

"Oh, nonsense! give you a new lease of life, though you certainly look as if the plains agreed with you. How is Mrs. Russud? What house have you taken?" said the colonel.

"She's very well, thank you! though she was extremely ill, according to her own account, until we got here. All humbug, you know. Nothing would do for her but the biggest and highest house here she could hear of—the Larch Runs; what a name!"

"I know. D——d fine house!" was Colonel Budlee's interjection; "belongs to old General Tows; the Daveys rented it last year; you are devilish lucky to get it, Russud."

"Good Lord!" Mr. Russud replied, indignantly.

"I was never in such a brutal place in my life. Did you ever try to walk up to it from the road? The path is so steep, I fell twice when I tried it, and very nearly rolled over the khud; and you know I am active enough on my pins in the plains. My wife and I have had no end of a row because I would have my bedroom downstairs, as I am accustomed to. Only yesterday, I declare, a great cloud came in through the windows, wetted everything, and stayed all night: I know it gave me this rheumatism." Mr. Russud rubbed his elbow again.

"Don't complain of the clouds until the rains. Are you by yourselves?"

"Just now we are; but we have invited McCuddum to come and stay for a month or two; and, of course, as soon as my boys' wives hear that we have a big house, they will both come up sharp, buchchas and all. Pleasant look out for me. My wife ought to have more sense, but she ——"

"What McCuddum is that?" said the colonel, again interrupting, for he liked to have his share of conversation; and if the old civilian seized more of it than he was justly entitled to, the colonel resolved

that he should talk about something more interesting than old Mrs. Russud.

"Don't you know him? He has got a great name; he is secretary to the Momjamma Board; pretty high up in the service too."

"Is his wife coming?" asked Colonel Budlee, in order that he might not appear entirely ignorant of a man whom he ought to have known.

"He never had one," said Mr. Russud, rather peevishly. "Don't know why, I'm sure. Which way are you going? It makes me quite chill standing here. The sun will soon be too high to stay out," he added, quickly, as if he were ashamed to acknowledge the coolness of the air.

"Let us walk towards your house," said Colonel Budlee. "I have not had half a constitutional yet. I must call soon and pay my respects to Mrs. Russud."

Mr. and Mrs. R—— were a very comfortable couple, dinner-loving and dinner-giving—good wine and excellent edibles; just the kind of people the colonel liked to know.

"We shall be very glad to see you. My heavens! take care! take care!"

The road was not particularly broad; the two gentlemen were walking along in the middle of it, when, just as they approached a rather sharp turn, four ponies rushed round it, coming at a hard canter in the other direction. The colonel, accustomed to surprises of this sort, sided easily to a safe place, leaving poor Mr. Russud in a helpless state of terror in the centre of the road. His instinct saved him from rushing to the khad side, and Providence saved him from being knocked down. His hat, which projected greatly on each side, was swept off by the first couple, and trampled incurably by the second. The party, two ladies and two gentlemen, saluted the colonel as they passed, one of the latter with an application of his fore-finger to the tip of his nose—a motion which appeared to amuse him, for he muttered, “That’s it, master Ned.” As they went, all joined in a laugh of mockery at poor Mr. Russud’s discomfiture, which that injured gentleman heard, and fully appreciated.

“Thank God! I’m not hurt, I believe,” he gasped out. “Now, Budlee, did you ever see, or hear, or read of, such infernal treatment as this. I do

believe they would rather have preferred seeing us trampled down, or rolling over the precipice. I have read of the way they behave at the Hills, but I never thought it was half so bad as this. It is a wonder I was not killed. My only Solah too; of course, I can't get another here, where it is a great deal more needed than in the plains. If I only knew who they were I should report them. Some — subs, I suppose. The women were quite as bad."

"You should have jumped to this side of the road, my dear fellow! They had not time to stop, and they did not see you until they got round the corner. We old fellows have no right to obstruct the roads, you know," said the colonel, jokingly. It did not suit him just then to tell his friend Mr. Russud that his son was the ringleader.

"Oh! that's no excuse at all, Budlee. People should be made to ride quietly, on the public roads at all events. I have not had such a shock for many years;" and poor Mr. Russud picked up and replaced the broken toadstool on his head, holding it on as he walked along sulkily, and looking a strange figure as he went along, with great fragments of

broken pith hanging about his ears. Fortunately, a jompan, which had been ordered out to convey him up the difficult ascent from the road to the Larch Runs, met him at the point, and bore him away.

"Gad! if he knew Master Ned was of the party, devilish few dinners I should get," said the colonel to himself, as he moved off, after a cold "good morning" from Mr. Russud; who was rather indignant at the colonel's not having come to grief like himself, and at his not having joined in abusing the behaviour of the young people. Before he reached his modest mansion, he was joined by Budlee junior on his pony.

"Left the women at their home, Ned? Do you know you nearly killed old Clem Russud?"

"Was that the old judge who came up a couple of days ago? Poor buffer! he had quite time to get out of the way. Aged and helpless parties of that description should not be allowed to trespass upon the highways on foot. They would be pretty safe in a jompan, but, in any case, they might be kept off the only decent road for a canter in the place."

"Of course," said the colonel; who did not for a

moment suspect that his son included him amongst the proscribed. "That was young Mrs. Ochter, I suppose, with Esther? rather a pretty woman. Who was the man riding with you? rather a good-looking fellow; I don't remember seeing his face before."

"His name is Stapleton,—a captain in the Buffards; he knew Ochter and his wife at Chillumpore, where the left wing of the regiment is stationed."

"I know! commanded by that beast Skewbald. Stapleton is fast, I suppose, like the rest of them?" said the father.

"Rayther; ready to gamble to any extent. Not an over good pay, I fancy. He has managed to make himself quite at home at Beauclerc Cottage already."

"I thought they were rather 'stand off' people," said the father.

"Yes! but young Mrs. O. likes him, and she is able to hold her own. She is a bit of a flirt, though she was only married the other day."

"Finds her loving husband rather a bore; obliged to take refuge from him in the Hills. Quite right, poor girl!"

But I must not edify my readers with much of the

conversation of the Budlees, father and son ; a little of it goes a great way : so I will allow them to disappear within the portals of Vaocluse, by which classic name the roomy but badly placed house they occupied was known. I have often wondered how house-building people on Paharnauth, and other Hill stations, manage to find such exquisitely objectionable sites as are selected at times. Vaocluse was down a ravine ; a level place had been found there, and on it a house was dropped immediately. There was no view whatever from it, except of the opposite wall of the ravine, covered with scrub, out of which cropped great masses of bare rock. There were some dwarf oaks about the house, and an inclosure, "where once a garden smiled," but not now. Colonel Budlee did not care for landscapes, or hill scenery, or flowers, or vegetables. The vapours which rose up from the marshy bottom of the ravine never troubled him. He rather liked the constant rawness of the air ; it gave him an excuse for a fire in the evening. He was very little at home : he spent his forenoons in the Kilta Club ; and as for dinners, like most people who go in for such luxuries

in India, he could find as many as he chose out of doors; the only return he made for them was in the shape of well-managed little tiffins, which were much admired.

The younger Budlee also used Vacluse only as a sleeping and breakfasting place. The Kilta Club was, at first, his constant resort, as, indeed, it was for all the male summer residents at the station, who had "no encumbrances," to borrow a figure of speech from advertisements for gardeners and gate-keepers in the home papers. Budlee junior was rather disappointed with the Kilta. As before hinted, he viewed it more as a place of business than pleasure, and somehow his business was very slack. Cards and billiards there were, but it almost invariably happened, that every party was made up, every table engaged, when he presented himself. He used to stand by and criticize the luck and the strokes, to the ill-disguised annoyance of the players. In the hope of making himself popular, he constantly proposed bets, backing the obviously losing side purposely, but no one ever took him up. I am afraid I cannot enlighten the reader with an account

of the effect this treatment had upon the sensitive soul of Lieutenant Budlee. He was quite sharp enough to see that he was disliked, but he suspected no more. His memory preserved for him, hidden away in its inmost penetralia, certain écarté and hazard secrets, which he guarded more carefully than his life; and he felt positive that they had never leaked out, or he would not dare to show his face in public. Alas for him! as already noticed, one or two of these secrets had leaked out; and now not one of the young fellows ever saw him touch a pack of cards, without fancying that he was practising some new plan of secreting the king; nor could he even "knock the balls about" by himself, without being watched and pointed at. Some weeks after the commencement of the season, at this stage of my narrative, he did what was best under the circumstances. He resolved to cease frequenting the club, and to get rid of the time, which threatened to weigh heavily upon him, by going into "society."

This arrangement of his succeeded very well. In the abandoned period I am writing of (morals are better now, of course) the delights of feminine

society were not courted extensively by the Strephons and Sybarites who yearly flocked to the hills. To their shame be it recorded, they preferred unlimited cues, cheroots, brandy, and loo. "Women are all devilish well," the dissolute young misogynists would say to each other, "on a ball night, or at a picnic, with plenty of simkin going; but as for "sammying" and "peacocking" about them from morning till night, thinking you are doing the devil and all, when they are laughing at you the whole time—oh, no, none for me, thank you. What's the turn up? Not my lead, is it?" &c. &c. There was, however, a fair sprinkling of ingenuous youths, who spent their days wandering from one drawing-room to another, and their evenings on the Mall. They were useful, and meant, no doubt, well, though they were regarded with pitiful scorn by the habitués of the Club, who, after a day's hard labour over green cloth, crowded in the window and stared at the passers-by from behind their cheroots at even-time. Certainly the ingenuous youths are useful. How lonely many poor ladies, who are cruelly separated from their husbands, and are obliged reluctantly to come to the Hills because

of their sick selves or their delicate children, would feel, if nobody ever visited them or showed them those little attentions without which, like choice exotics, the fairest among them would fade and pine away!

Woman is a much more gregarious creature than man: she cannot exist without hearing new tongues and seeing new faces; she, too, rarely has resources within herself, and is consequently much less independent of the outer world than most men. Again, a young and lively lady would mope to death on the Hills, if she had none but her lady friends to amuse her. Ladies have very limited powers of entertaining each other, as far as I have observed, and very few try. Members of the fiercer sex, in the capacity of husbands, cousins, constant callers, riding companions, child-leaders, intimate acquaintances, bowing acquaintances, and so forth, are essential to the enjoyment and well-being of every proper-minded woman. You can't deny it, Mrs. Grundy—you can't indeed! They all long for *petits soirs*, just as children do for bonbons; and just as a child will take a bonbon from the dirtiest cook-maid's hand, rather than not

have it at all, so Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Robinson, if they can find no better, will smile, and talk, and be excessively amused with the ugliest and stupidest specimens of masculine humanity. Remember this, Bill Baloo, thou friend of my youth! and rail not at mother Nature for thy blazing hair, thy green eyes, thy gaping nostrils, thy knock-knees, and thy stutter. Call often, and be kind to poor little dark Mrs. Surma, whom nobody knows; and soon shalt thou see her smile sweetly in reply to thy lumbering bow to her passing jompan, and she will think as highly of thee as if thou wert a rival of D'Orsay, mentally and physically. As a corollary to the above, I do not venture to lay it down that Mr. Budlee, albeit by no means ill-favoured, would have been acceptable to the ladies of Paharnauth, if they knew as much of him as the members of the Kilta Club. Ladies, fortunately for both, know nothing of men's vices. No door was closed against Budlee; he was as well received as other men of his class, who devoted themselves to "sammying." He became a lady's man very fast, and really began to forget his former self. His respectable parent

wondered at the change in his son, though he happily did not know the cause of it; indeed, he was rather unsuccessful in his own proceedings. The dowager Mrs. Ochter gave him no encouragement. He endeavoured to be very attentive when a rare opportunity offered, but she repelled him politely, though decisively. She made it a point in their conversation to allude to their respective ages, and to express her wonder, in an irritating way of hers, at Colonel Budlee's looking so young. This the poor colonel very wisely pronounced to be "a —— bad sign."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE GYNÆCEUM.

"INDEED, I think her very nice; I shall call her Flora from to-morrow. You are always finding fault, Loo. Isn't she, Esty?"

"Who is 'she,' pray?" Esther asked.

"Why, cross Loo, of course," replied Gertrude. "What would poor Henry think if he were to hear that his darling Flora has a deceitful expression? Upon my word!"

"You must not annoy Louisa, you know, Gerty. I like dear Henry's bride very much, and I am sure she is very pretty."

"What has set you against her, Loo?"

Louisa, who was looking hard at a book open before her, and which she was persuading herself she was reading, turned towards Esther, and said drearily,—

"I don't like her, and I know I never shall."

"But why, dear?" said Esther.

"I always decide about people at first sight, and I never am wrong," said Louisa, positively. "I say again, she has a deceitful expression, and I wish she was not Henry's wife."

"You are a great deal too harsh in your judgment, I know you are, Loo; mamma would be very angry, if she thought you could say such things after a few hours' acquaintance with one we are all bound to love."

"Yes; and she admired you very much, didn't she, Jock?" said Gerty, disturbing at the same time the placid slumber of Jock, who lay at her feet with his tail so temptingly extended, that she could not avoid giving it a gentle pull.

"Mamma appears greatly pleased with her, doesn't she, Loo?" said Esther to her sister, who had gone back again to her book.

"I am glad mamma is so easily pleased," that young lady retorted, rather savagely. She would not be drawn into a conversation at any price.

"Oh! don't mind her, Esty!" said the youngest.

"We can go about a great deal more, now that Flora has come; of course, I prefer going with mamma, but she never was up time enough to go out in the morning—the pleasantest time of all—and Flora says she is sure she will get up very early every day. Do you think she is delicate?"

"Not very, at present," replied Esther, with all submission to Gertrude's rush of talk.

"Then why did she leave poor Henry?" snapped Louisa.

"Didn't she mention at tea, dear," said the gentle Esther, "that the doctor and Henry himself forced her up here, entirely against her will?"

"How extremely probable!" Louisa answered, in her most ironical tone.

"Mamma says she is sure she will be greatly admired; and Mr. Gregorian said, when he was going away, that he thought Henry extremely fortunate, and that Flora was as amiable as she was pretty," said Gertrude.

"Oh! he praises everybody, like Dr. Sou-dagur."

"Indeed, he is not in the least like Dr. Soudagur, Loo; and it is very unkind of you to say so," said Gertrude, evidently making a personal grievance of Louisa's last speech.

"My dear Gerty, what's the matter?" said Esther, rather astonished at her vehemence.

In fact, poor Gertrude looked very red and distressed, and more inclined to burst into tears than to do further battle with Louisa, who also looked wonderingly at her.

"I wonder," said Gertrude, trying to recover herself, "is there anybody in the world Loo likes?"

"I wonder who Miss Gertrude likes, particularly. 'I love my love with a what, dear?'" said Esther, feeling a little mischievous, and inclined to take every advantage, *post modum puellarum*, of her recent discovery.

"Oh! you need not be jealous, Esther," poor Gerty replied, having no resource but a *tu quoque*.

"Why, Gertrude, you are as silly and childish as ever to-night," said Louisa; "really, for the last few weeks, you were so quiet and sedate, that

I thought you had found out how old you were at last, and were not going to play the child any more."

"Well, she certainly has improved," said Esther. "Look, Loo, how she is blushing at all the praise you have been giving her;" and indeed poor Gerty's bare white neck became first pink, and then peony in colour.

Her face, brunette and freckled, did not betray her so much; but, unhappily, these young ladies were chatting in that apparel which maidens are understood to appear in close upon bedtime—loosened hair, garments snowy white and flowing, alabaster feet, tiny slippers, &c.—so there was no concealment for the blushing Gertrude.

"What do you think of Mr. Budlee, Loo?" screamed Gerty, thirsting for revenge upon her elder sister, and hoping to divert the attention of both from herself. "He is such a nice young man, and pays such delicate attentions to somebody I know. It will be so nice to have him for a brother-in-law. I should love him myself, except that Jock can't bear him. How dare you try to bite him, sir? Sit up

at once and beg Esther's pardon!" and she seized the victim and placed him in the required position before her sister; but the wretched Jock, overpowered by sleep, and seeing no inducement to obey, fell down helplessly to one side the moment she took her hands away.

"Is Mr. Budlee such a favourite of yours, Esther?" asked Louisa, pitying Gertrude perhaps, and coming to her rescue. "I didn't know. I go out so little."

"Louisa! how can you?"

"We never go out without his joining us,—you know we don't. I believe he watches for Esther on the Mall; everybody remarks it. To be sure she pretends to be indignant, and to find fault with him; but that's all pretence. Mamma wanted to give him a hint that she would prefer him not to ride and walk with us day after day; but Miss Esther said it would be rude, and begged her not to. Poor mamma is quite deceived. I am going to tell her, though, what I know. I should not wonder if they were engaged."

A glance towards Esther, during the delivery of

this tirade, satisfied Louisa that Gertrude's accusations signified nothing; convinced of this, and her crossness having melted away, she said to Esther, gravely, assuming as serious an expression as possible,—

“I don't think it is quite right, Esther, to encourage him, if mamma does not approve of it!”

By virtue of her habitual reserve, and distaste for what most young women long for—visitors, balls, races, &c.—Louisa, though younger than Esther, was rather looked up to by the latter. Esther became indignant.

“You must not talk such nonsense again, Gertrude. You know quite well you are trying to mislead Loo. You will go on in the same way before strangers some time. How often have you heard me say I can't endure Mr. Budlee; and you know, too, mamma has all but asked him not to come with us so often. You are very annoying.”

“Time to go to sleep, my darlings; it is long past eleven,” said their mother, tapping at the bedroom door.

“Oh, come in, mamma; it is quite early yet.”

“No, no; you should all have been fast asleep long ago.”

The three maidens, not sorry, perhaps, to have their conversation interrupted, arose, and, having exchanged such embraces as loving sisters are, no doubt, continually giving each other, Louisa and Gertrude, the latter attended by Jock, passed into their joint room; Esther, as senior, possessing one all to herself.

It was a delicious night; and when the lights were extinguished, Gertrude, notwithstanding Louisa's entreaties to the contrary, would have one short “look out.” Accordingly she opened the window and leant out over the sill, on which stood some pots containing her own particular mignonette, and one or two other favourites, the seeds of which she had gathered herself, and brought from aunt Kitty's garden at Long Orchard. She gazed on a glorious scene without caring for it much; few women care for nature's best handiwork: but Gertrude was hot and rather vexed, and the cold clear air soothed her. Louisa, after a short despondent commune with herself, such as she seldom escaped, dropped asleep.

Flora, who had arrived that evening, had looked with a surprised expression at poor Loo's plain face. The poor girl caught it: for her faculties were sharpened by the morbid ideas about herself which ever troubled her; and this incident perhaps, without her being conscious of it, was at the bottom of the early antipathy she evinced towards her sister-in-law.

Louisa was becoming more and more unhappy every day. Except under compulsion, she would never leave Beauclerc Cottage; even on Sundays she begged her mother hard not to ask her to go to church: she was a sad puzzle to Mrs. Ochter senior. Louisa had decided that there was no place in society for ugly faces, and that she was much wiser in shutting herself up, than in going abroad to be neglected. Her notions were, it will be seen, extremely peculiar. How fortunate it is that they are not common; otherwise how empty our carriages, our chapels, and our ball-rooms would be! Each woman's faith in her own fascinations is the mainstay of polite gatherings. All in Beauclerc Cottage were asleep long before Gertrude, who was so lately a child, closed the casement and crept in the dark to

her little white couch. Flora, who was fatigued by her journey, had retired early to the state chamber appointed for her.

When Mrs. Ochter senior had heard from her son a short time before that Flora was not very strong, the good lady, guessing what he wished her to do, wrote most pressingly, inviting Flora to Paharnauth. After a decorous amount of resistance on her side, and of coaxing on her young husband's, who, grieved as he was to part with her, took no note of his own feelings in his anxiety for her, she left Chillumpore and reached Paharnauth in safety. She made a most favourable impression upon the Beauclerc household, Louisa excepted. Flora was so modest and quiet, so constantly declaring that she should be perfectly happy if dear Henry was only with her, and that the moment she got strong again she would rejoin him, that it is no wonder they were very much pleased with her. She knew nobody, she believed, at Paharnauth, except Captain Stapleton; strange he had not yet called at Beauclerc Cottage. He was a great friend of Henry's; he had promised when he left to call at their house first. She was enchanted

with Beauclerc Cottage and its gardens: she had no expectation, when she left England, ever to see a real English home until her return. Had Bushire arrived? was he quite well? she would not for the whole world wish anything to happen to the little Arab dear Henry had broken in for her. Having said much to this effect, the traveller was finally conducted to her chamber, and there betook herself to repose in a very contented frame of mind,—never sending a thought in the direction of Chillumpore, where, faithful to her ordinances, leaning against a pillar in the verandah, with an uncomfortable cheroot between his lips, was the deserted husband, oppressed by a feeling of utter loneliness and privation, yet gratified by the remembrance of the difficulty he had met with in inducing Flora, even for her health's sake, to leave him.

Pray don't pity him, O ye husbands, however blessed ye may be with angels whose whole affections are yours beyond question, who, if ever they went to the hills, *vobis relictis*, were *really* dangerously ill, and never allowed a day to pass without letting you have four crossed sheets filled with unalterable love and

adoration. Deceived and cozened of his true love-measure, as we see poor Ochter to be, he is perfectly happy with the false one, and what more can we wish him? Lony Ochter scarcely knew his Flora at all as yet. It required very little exertion on her part to retain him in this state of happy ignorance; and she did not spare it, to her full credit be it written. Many other women of the Flora stamp would not have even taken so much trouble: their claws would have been at once unsheathed, when the husband-victim was safe in their grasp; but Flora's was, as I endeavour to show, a very superior order of heartlessness, and herein Ochter had a great advantage over numbers of brother-victims.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CACODÆMON.

CAPTAIN STAPLETON had, as Flora supposed, arrived at Paharnauth some days before her, and had found not over-comfortable quarters in Rocklodge, the permanent residence of Captain Gingall, who was on the Invalid Establishment for reasons unknown. There was a Mrs. Gingall, a relative of his mother's, and two Misses Gingall, and one Master Gingall. The house was small, and situated in the back slums of the station; it commanded a cheerful view of a large Native bazaar principally, and beyond that a hillock, covered with a clump of straggling pines, shut out any further view. Behind, a bare crag beetled over the house in an awe-inspiring way, whence its name. On each side there was a fair quantity of level ground, which might have been turned into something pleasing to the eye; but, alas!

for Stapleton's peace of mind! it was covered with ranges of low mud buildings, fully inhabited by pigs, sheep, and fowls of all edible kinds; for Captain Gingall combined the *utile* with the *dulce*, the former element vastly preponderating, and supplied half the residents with flesh meat of various kinds, on the "quick sale and by no means small profits" system. His bacon, which, the good people of Paharnauth implicitly believed, was derived from the frames of the descendants of imported Berkshire progenitors, you met at every table. He killed and prepared his meats on the premises; in truth, the ladies of the family were helping to make sausages in the verandah on the day Stapleton turned up. Gingall was by no means a bad kind of fellow, though old and coarse. The same description will apply to his lady. They ate, drank, and slept well, and never went out of their own circle, which must have been of a particularly small diameter.

The description of the Misses Gingall would be too painful for the sensitive reader. The eldest was eighteen: she could read to herself, but not aloud without difficulty; she wrote well enough to draw up

the mutton and pork papers, which were always circulating, so distinctly that they could be read without much trouble. Gawky, slovenly, weak-eyed, the poor girl is altogether outside the pale of a story, however simple; and her sister, two years younger, must also be excluded. The family was not poor now, but it had been so some time before; and Captain and Mrs. Gingall carefully preserved in their prosperity the habits which poverty had once forced upon them. Their children were entirely uneducated: a fact which, I am persuaded, never cost the Gingalls a pang.

Whether it was with some wild idea of fascinating Stapleton with one of the girls, and so securing a position in life for her, or because she thought herself bound on the score of kindred to be civil to him, that Mrs. Gingall had invited him to Rocklodge, I am unable to say. He had no idea what their establishment was like when he warmly accepted the invitation, happy fellow! to enjoy himself in the Hills at so cheap a rate. Accordingly he arrived, as I have stated, on sausage day, and his humour may be imagined when he saw

the ladies of the family engaged in a task which is decidedly not calculated to enhance natural feminine charms. He was not expected for two days later, and his arrival caused no little consternation. By some good luck his baggage did not appear; he was riding a pony a friend had lent him for the last stage of the journey. Though instant flight had at first suggested itself, he resolved on reflection to get out of his difficulty as gracefully as possible. Captain Gingall welcomed him very cordially, regretted that they had just dined; but they would have some splendid pork chops cooked for him directly. Mrs. Gingall and daughters had vanished into the house on Stapleton's first appearance.

"Gone to wash her hands," said the old captain, with no appearance of hesitation, pointing in the direction of certain pans and vessels essential to sausage-making, as much as to intimate that in them lay the secret of his wife's unfitness to appear.

"Why don't you get off, and come in, man?" Captain Gingall asked, rather impatiently, seeing that the guest stuck to his saddle.

"Thank you," Stapleton replied; "the fact is, I

have only come to ask you to excuse my not accepting your very kind invitation. An old friend of mine here declares that I made a solemn promise to come and stay with him long ago, and he will not let me off."

Considering the urgency of the case, this impromptu is creditable to its framer.

"Do as you like—do as you like, my boy," was the familiar answer of his relative's husband, whom he had never met before. "If you don't like to stay here, you are free to go. We have no claim upon your company."

At this juncture Mrs. Gingall emerged; and the miserable Stapleton could not but get off his horse to greet her.

"How like your poor mother you are!" she said, looking kindly into his face.

These few words of the aged sausage-maker went straight to his heart. They banished all ideas of flight, and all memory of the verandah scene. He would not have moved now for any consideration. Stapleton had lost his mother years and years before, but not without learning that the love she bore him

was a priceless jewel, which perished with her, and which no other earthly love could equal. In his wildest Indian days he often looked back to her; his father's harsh treatment had made him reckless; but he never could think, without tears starting into his eyes, of her grave in the churchyard, hidden among the oaks of the stately Staple Park. (The right of sepulture in the ancestral cemetery was the only manorial privilege left to his fathers,—the broken-down Staple Fells branch of the family, of which mention has been already made.) Stapleton had not the remotest expectation that he should find, in the poor Indianized Mrs. Gingall, an early friend of her whose memory was the only tie existing between him and all others who bore the name of the Lancashire Stapletons. Though not given to sickly sentimentalities, it moved him very much to hear her name mentioned again. His character had no tinge of singularity. If I were to describe it accurately, it is so commonly met with that I should probably be called to account by scores of my acquaintances, Foot and Mounted, for "putting them into a book."

His qualifications of mind and body were something above the average; but while he did not neglect the latter, the former were utterly disregarded. He did not care much for books. He worshipped the goddess of idleness (name unknown) under various guises, as a jockey, a pig-sticker, a fair shot, a good billiard and whist player, a capital mess-manager, a lively talker in ladies' society, and a first-rate waltzer. He was capable of an occasional good-natured act, when the doing of it put him to no personal inconvenience; and he was not more selfish or conceited than his fellows. If the shocking truth can be borne, he was negative on religious subjects; the moral value of a clergyman, in his mind, was in inverse proportion to the length of his sermons. He had sown the various descriptions of wild oats suited to the soil and climate of Hindostan; all of which had grown well, and their harvest been duly garnered for him in the Meehurbanee Bank, the Gureepurwäh Bank, and several other such repositories. He was hospitable, and gentlemanly, and brave; and was altogether as good a fellow in every respect as many men of his day, and very much better than most.

I need scarcely say that the life at Rocklodge, which cannot be conveniently delineated here, would have oppressed him beyond all bearing, if the resources of the Kilta were not open. With the help of friends there, whose inquiries as to his present residence he had the greatest difficulty in parrying, he made the time slide away. Being too discerning and sensible to shun the delightful society of the ladies of Paharnauth, he had resolved to commence "calling" at once (though he put it off every day), and for this purpose got a list from little Hilsa—a Paharnauth quidnunc of repute—of the various people he ought to know. To copy this would be to inflict upon the reader a string of names longer than Homer's catalogue of the Greek ships, from "No. 1, Mrs. Atta, residence Thyme Bank, sister, two 'spins,' to No. 15, Colonel and Mr. Wallah, residence Hatterick House, four 'spins' (one still in trousers)." In it, of course, Beauclerc Cottage appeared, and reminded him of Mrs. Ochter junior, whom, I am grieved to have to record, he had not once thought of since his last conversation with that lady a night or two before he left, when he ardently

declared to her the pleasure he should have in meeting her again in the Hills, and how anxiously he should look forward to her arrival there.

Holding these protestations of devotedness in mind, Flora was not a little astonished to hear, on reaching Paharnauth, that no Captain Stapleton had yet presented himself at her mother-in-law's gate. She decided in her own mind that some *contretemps* must have occurred to prevent his coming. He had undertaken, too, to visit Bushire's stable at the cottage, and to see that the horse of her heart was well tended. "No! he can't be here surely," she said to herself, for she made no allusion to Captain Stapleton in the hearing of the Beauclerc folk after her first inquiries about him.

It might be difficult to estimate exactly the amount of interest, to use the most cautious language, which Flora took in the sayings and doings of the wild captain of Buffadars. She had heard a great deal about him, not at all to his credit, from her aunt Skewbald and other good authorities at Chillumpore. In his conversations with her he sneered at everybody, not even excepting him whom she was bound

to "love, honour, and obey;" but he had a pleasant way of making the defects of others redound to her glorification; and this he did so skilfully that even the clever Flora believed him the sincerest of her admirers.

I may be accused of having previously represented Flora, in her conversations with her husband, as talking very severely of, and not attempting to disguise her antipathy to Stapleton, and of now making her look at him in quite a different light. That Flora was in the habit of saying one thing and thinking another, I have before explained, and, incredible as it may appear, it is my conviction, that even when she was, of course unconsciously, gratifying her husband by denouncing him, the said wild captain occupied rather more of her thoughts than the fortunate Mr. Ochter himself. So long as it was necessary for her to devote her energies to securing the latter gentleman for life, she troubled her mind little with investigating the good or bad qualities of a Native Infantry captain, who, as such, was entirely beyond, or below, a prudent maiden's consideration; but position and establishment secured, and dear Henry

proving dreadfully dull at times, she could afford, and found it even agreeable, to think of and to chat with the only presentable man she believed Chillum-pore to possess.

I do not think that Captain Stapleton, on his side, was sinful enough to make any particular advances to Flora, single or married. He was very glad, as most young fellows are who have nothing better to do, of every opportunity of a talk with a very pretty and lively woman; for Flora, who was silent and retiring in her maiden days, rapidly became rather the reverse after her marriage; but there was little, if any, Don Juanism about him. If Flora thought there was, she would not for the world have tolerated him within speaking distance. With the usual acuteness of her sex, she was not long in discovering that her husband, however carefully he endeavoured to conceal the fact, would have preferred her not being on very cordial terms of acquaintanceship with *his* friend Captain Stapleton (for the latter was a great friend of *his*), and it was to gratify this feeling of his that, whenever he and she discussed the merits of their different friends, she was invariably severe

upon Stapleton. This incense, offered by her on the altar of matrimonial harmony, somehow lost its savour in the husband's nostrils whenever he saw his wife and the man she was so hard upon, together.

Not to protract this delicate analysis, Stapleton, from the day he left Chillumpore, bestowed, as I have observed, not a thought upon Flora, while she was so far deluded as to believe that he must think very much of her indeed. She looked forward to many pleasant rides and walks with him at Paharnauth, for he was familiar with the mountain life of India, and had often, by his eloquent descriptions *post modum Othellonis*, charmed her with its beauties. He was much to blame, in fact, for the serious illness which rendered a sojourn in the Hills indispensable, according to Dr. Huddee, for the young wife.

CHAPTER XIV.

LAMBS AND WOLVES.

As far at least as one party was concerned, there was a great deal of truth in the account which Gertrude rather spitefully rendered to Louisa of the fair Esther's love-passages. Budlee junior, compelled by the slanders of his enemies, as we have seen, to abandon the card and the cue, patronized the Beauclerc ladies in a marked manner. To their astonishment, he called as often as he could find a pretext at the house ; and no morning or evening rides could be accomplished without his attaching himself. He was most anxious, too, to be obliging ; and his services for any little commission were being perpetually volunteered, though rarely or never accepted.

He may have had too good an opinion of himself to observe how very distasteful he was to Mrs. and the Misses Ochter ; but it is nearer the truth to say

that he was blinded by an influence from which wicked men are no more exempt than the most virtuous. He had been greatly impressed by Esther's gentle beauty on his first visit, and recently, gambling distractions removed, having an unoccupied mind to work upon, it had produced therein a crop of ideas entirely novel, and such as metamorphosed his notions of life altogether. The prudent young gentleman who had so lately denounced matrimony as the most miserable of human institutions, was well in love, and calculating the possibility of maintaining a wife upon his pay, about the time the lady of his choice and her mother were devising some plan which should, without hurting his feelings, relieve them of his constant society. For, as Gertrude said, his assumption of the duties of *cavalier servente* had been remarked, and people wondered very much at Mrs. Ochter's allowing it.

He was one of those unhappy men, not at all scarce, who have not the capacity of discovering themselves to be ever *de trop*. Conceit, which may be but self-respect intensified, is an essential quality to success in many critical positions; but

that form of it which renders one callous to all impressions from without, which tends to convince him that he must be immensely applauded and admired by everybody he encounters, is almost worse than extreme humility. It never, by any possibility, crossed Budlee junior's brain that he could be unacceptable, wherever he offered himself. As his feelings of reverence for Esther's beauty, which silenced him at first, wore off through constant intercourse, he addressed, greatly to her distress, all his remarks on things in general to her, and believed himself the only safe entry for the prize, while she was doing all in her power to shake him off civilly. The poor infatuated Budlee, for all his high notions of himself, was humble enough as a lover. The disease in his case, though somewhat peculiar, produced the usual effect: he would have gone through fire and water to gain a smile; he would have starved and thirsted, and borne without a murmur the heaviest privations, to obtain her a trivial gratification. Faugh! I must not travel over ground so common, so hacked, so cut up with ruts and millions of foot-tracks, as this! If many have

written laboured love-histories, very many more have been actors in them. Love-tragedies of the darkest hue become, when the victim recovers, comedies which he never can sufficiently laugh at : so say the experienced.

Let us hope that such may be the fortune of the poor wight before us. Great, indeed, was his audacity in aspiring to the sweet maiden high Esther, the May queen of Paharnauth ; for, though innumerable Marians and Helens, and Rosas and Virginias, had appeared upon the Mall, very many of them fair to look upon, there is no question about Esther's place. Like the famous Eclipse, she was first, and the others nowhere. My story will say little or nought of the above Rosas and Virginias, for who is there that does not know all about them ? They arrive from hundreds of stations in the plains, which they have come to from England in the previous cold season. If they have done nothing in the winter campaign, through dearth of balls or pic-nics, they are certain to achieve something in the shape of a husband at Paharnauth. The history of one answers for all. But an eclectic being like

Esther cannot be disposed of so easily; she cannot, like "spins" in general, be allowed, when an admirer, not a positive brute or pauper, turns up, to marry him and be done with it. Her career must be very different. If it is possible to fancy that a girl bereft of all physical advantages could at the present day fascinate and enthrall men by the charms of her mind and manner alone, Esther Ochter would have been capable thereof, if, instead of making her very beautiful, Nature had treated her hardly. Thus wondrously endowed, she was widely and sincerely admired, even by critics of her own sex. Consequently, Mrs. Ochter senior had very good reasons for entertaining brilliant ideas of her daughter's future.

That lady's fond love for her daughters was tempered by a just anxiety for their safe settlement in life. This point, according to the compact agreed to on the marriage question, she believed to be left altogether in her own hands. Beyond the notice it attracted, she saw no cause for absolute alarm at young Budlee's persistent attentions to Esther, such as she should have felt if, besides his want of pro-

spects, he was likely to prove at all attractive to her daughter. On this score she had no uneasiness, for the young lady herself declared against him in the most positive manner. Mrs. Ochter senior had once apprehended an attachment in which Mr. Gregorian was an interested party. She had the highest respect for the reverend gentleman, and could desire no more select companion for her girls; but then he was not so highly placed in a temporal point of view as to be welcomed as a suitor. A lady can have a very exalted opinion of anybody without at the same time wishing him for a son-in-law. If Mr. Gregorian had even been a Joint Magistrate, or something of that sort, it would have been very well; but, as a chaplain, with not more than a respectable and fixed income, and no particular promotion to look forward to, it would not have been treating Esther properly to encourage him.

In his case, too, Esther relieved her mother by letting her infer that she was not by any means likely to love Mr. Gregorian, in the accepted sense of the word. No lady in his congregation gave him more assistance and less trouble in his

little church matters; she sang with much feeling and taste, and she bore her election to the place of *prima donna* in the choir with so much humility, that not more than twelve ladies, who were convinced of their own superior claims, hated her for ever afterwards in consequence. Mr. Gregorian, who had no notion of the uneasiness he had at first caused in the maternal bosom, was not afterwards subjected to the repellent treatment which Mrs. Ochter (for was she not a woman and a mother?) would not have shrunk from bringing to bear upon him if required.

Esther, albeit very beautiful and very amiable, was not, I beg you, sweet reader, to understand fully, an angel disguised in human form. I have encountered, and very much admired, some very perfect feminine characters, but never an angel; except in story-books, in which one cannot always place implicit confidence. She was, however, entirely destitute of those practical ideas as to the object of marrying, which young ladies of the present day, who are properly brought up, invariably cherish. This important feature of Esther's education had been grossly neglected by her aunt Sleigh. Her

mother did all in her power to remedy the sad deficiency; but she found her daughter, I grieve to state, very impatient of instruction. They had frequently discussed husband-taking in all its features; and the great difference between them was, that in enumerating qualifications, Esther placed fortune and position below morals, manners, character, person, and family, while her mother did the reverse. The younger lady, however, observed a *juste milieu*; she would not, for instance, have married a coachman with the manner and person of Count D'Orsay and the character and morals of the Reverend Mr. Spurgeon, or any other devout and immaculate person; but she would almost as soon have married him as a withered but wealthy and surly old bachelor of sixty.

Her mother argued the point very sensibly.

"Love in a lodging with delicate children, shabby dresses, no servants, and no comfort, is all nonsense, my dear—isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, mamma," assented Esther, with a shudder.

"Your great object should be, to avoid any attachment which might bring you in the end to

such dreadful things," Mrs. Ochter would say, triumphantly.

"Well, yes, I suppose so," Esther would answer with some hesitation.

"Then, my darling, the only safe plan is, never to receive any one's attentions unless you are certain of his means. I am an old woman now, Esther, and I have seen many a couple commence life on an ensign's pay. They thought they were fond enough of each other not to mind pinching, but this notion did not last, and brought nothing but unhappiness. Wealth may not make people happy, but poverty will surely make them miserable. I have seen enough to feel certain of this."

Esther acknowledged that her mother was right; but she wondered at her making so much of money, while poor aunt Sleigh, who had had to win her own way through life, valued it very little. The reason of the difference is obvious. Aunt Sleigh was an old maid, and, as such, all her ideas had a tinge of romance, which nothing but the experience of the married state could efface; but everybody knows that there is no such defect in a prudent

matron with grown-up daughters. No rose-tints, or gilding of any sort, will deceive her. She is entirely blind to a man's good or bad looks; though with younger ladies, weak-minded bachelors believe their personal appearance is all important. She will welcome a rich Cyclops, and refuse admission to a poor Adonis; she will smile on a wealthy Rochester, but not on a poor saint. These, however, are hackneyed truths. Beyond this perversion of ideas on the husband question, Esther had few serious defects. She knew, of course, that she was very beautiful, and delighted in admiration. This "pure womanly" feature of her character I consider no defect. She did not on account of it give herself airs, or look down upon people; she felt no envy (and this may be hard to believe) of Miss Tota's singing, or of Miss Shamma's dancing better than herself. She was equally kind and gracious to all, most anxious to please in society, and at home sweet-tempered and entirely unselfish.

What a blessing it would be to one about to marry if, on the *diable boiteux* principle, he could see the object of his choice divested of her "company"

manners and expression : for the two conditions differ from each other as much as the shapely-limbed stage Peri, with gossamer wings and pink pyjamas (of the tight variety), differs from the same being standing in the slips, with a greasy shawl on, and her poor rouged and raddled face buried in a pot of porter.

No test of this sort would have lowered Esther ; she was as gentle and as kind with plain Louisa, in the latter's most cross-grained moments, as she was in her conversation with Mrs. Posteen, who, as wife of the president of the Sudder Bekoofee Board, took precedence of every other person in the place, and was a very grand lady indeed. It was most important to stand well with her, for her balls and parties were the gayest and the most select ; and her house, Medmenham Towers, boasted of the finest ball-room in Paharnauth.

Flora did not take at all sincerely to Esther, though, for her belle-mère's gratification, she spoke most highly of her attractions : in the first place, she felt that, as far as beauty went, Esther, whose "points," too, resembled hers, had the best of it.

Pretty women, both candidates for admiration, cannot take kindly to each other; it is against human nature. One might fancy that there could not well be much rivalry between Esther and Flora, seeing that the latter was, as it were, settled for life; her cruise was over, whereas the other's was only just beginning; but, if I have represented Flora rightly, there will be no difficulty in understanding that, without reference to her being no longer a "spin," she had no small craving for the applause of the multitude. She had her husband's love, but he had little of hers; and this may be at the bottom of her unwifely principles. Her little antipathy to Esther was made manifest, as is the way with ladykind, by never-ceasing smiles and embracings.

In the house or out, Flora was never happy without Esther. What a boon politeness is! When Molly the cook-maid differs with Sally the scullery-maid on the subject of the butcher's boy, the dreadful creatures call each other odious names, and may proceed to actual violence; but when Emily and Lucinda hate each other cordially, they show their animosity by the most affectionate

kisses and the most endearing epithets,—because they are educated, and devout, and accomplished ; and, what is more important, they can, in this charming fashion, make each other aware of mutual ill-will quite as satisfactorily as if they used their tongues and their pink almond nails, like Molly and Sally.

Flora, a few days after her arrival at Paharnauth, was riding on Bushire, with Esther and Gertrude also mounted, but on indigenous steeds, sure as to step, shaggy as to mane and fetlocks, and about the height of Shetlands. (They were known to those young ladies as Rover and Neptune, since they had a good deal of the Newfoundland in them.) Mrs. Ochter senior was with them in her state jompan, and the love-stricken Budlee was, as usual, in attendance.

A shabby jompan, containing a faded and elderly female, whom Mrs. Ochter and her daughters did not know, approached ; and by its side, Flora, to her astonishment, saw Captain Stapleton walking, in very earnest talk with its occupant. Mrs. Ochter, being in front, turned round after a decent interval, and said to her daughters, “ I wonder who those can

be!" She was somewhat surprised to observe, when she looked round, that the gentleman had stopped, and Flora also. Mrs. Ochter went on, while the faded lady in the shabby jompan, as soon as she had gone beyond hearing distance, caused it to be set down on the road, and there waited patiently.

It was poor Mrs. Gingall; she rarely ventured into public places, and only came to-day on the invitation of Stapleton, who had discovered that, staying as he was at Rocklodge, he had no right to disown the occupants, who were very kind to him after their fashion, and, by way of punishing himself for previous neglect, he appeared in public with his relative, thinking very much of what people would say, and persuading himself that he did not care in the least. Mrs. Ochter junior knew that she ought to have given him not more than a cold bow, and passed on (need I mention that a lady's cold bow is a bending of the upper half of the frame, without permitting any sign of recognition to appear upon the face?); but then she was a little wilful, and she had, to say the truth, felt somewhat desolate

at seeing none but strange faces since she left Chillumpore.

Captain Stapleton glanced at Flora and her sisters-in-law! "What a beautiful girl," he murmured. He fully expected a distant salute from Flora, and would have preferred just then to have received the same. But when she stopped, he stopped, and putting on an expression of extreme delight at seeing her, he said,—

"Is it possible you have arrived, Mrs. Ochter? I have been making inquiries every day, I assure you; but no one could tell me whether you had come or not. How long have you been here?"

"It would have been very easy, Captain Stapleton," Flora replied, stiffly, "to ascertain."

"And how is Bushire?" Stapleton asked, patting the Arab's neck, for he felt how strong a case was against him, and he wished to create a diversion.

"Oh! pray, don't pretend to care for him now; he was many days before me at Beauclerc Cottage; and you never ——"

"That's the name, of course; it was very stupid of

me to forget it," said the convicted Stapleton. "I should have written it down."

"This is nonsense," said Flora, getting annoyed; "any one could have told you where Mrs. Ochter lived—you, probably, forgot that name also;" and she prepared to canter off.

"Well, if I plead guilty, will you forgive me?" said Stapleton, looking as sorry as he could.

"I will, if you tell me why you did not show yourself. Candidly, mind!" said Flora, who, somehow, did not canter off.

"Hear, then, O Queen! Firstly, I am staying at a very out-of-the-way place, and it's a long distance to come to call."

"That excuse won't do," said Flora, sharply.

"Secondly, I found several old friends at the club, and I never could get away from them at the regulation visiting hours; but," he said, looking in the direction of Mrs. Gingall's jompan, "I cannot keep this poor old cousin of mine waiting. Let me send her home, and I will walk on with you, if you will allow me."

"You scarcely deserve it, but you may."

So Stapleton, weak mortal that he was, ran up to Mrs. Gingall and asked her to go on; he should "pick her up" immediately: and then returned to Flora, who was walking Bushire on slowly. It was shabby treatment on his part, he thought to himself.

"Your old friends at the club mean what, Captain Stapleton? Billiards, and card parties, of course, and dissipation?"

"How can you fancy such things?" he said.

"No more reasons for breaking your promises?" Flora asked.

"Yes! Beauclerc Cottage means, I am given to understand, a mother and three spins, and I can't stand spins!"

"How very silly! but please remember to speak a little more respectfully of my dear Henry's mother and sisters. Besides, they could not be kinder to me. The girls are most amiable, and the eldest, Esther, is a regular beauty, and so unaffected, I am so fond of her that I should be quite miserable without her." (Oh! Flora, Flora!) "You must have noticed her riding with me just now."

"Which? there were two: one most painfully

dark, and the other a girl with suspicious hair and rather a stupid expression."

(If it was Flora's rôle to cry up Esther, it was as certainly Stapleton's rôle to cry her down.) This parenthesis is for the information of those who are ignorant of the formulæ of polite conversation.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Captain Stapleton! Fancy calling Esther's beautiful golden hair suspicious," said the gratified Flora.

"I really saw nothing overpowering in either of the young ladies," said Stapleton, who knew his work thoroughly, though conscious of a mental spasm, when he spoke of Esther as he did, for he thought her "wondrous fair."

"Besides," he continued, "I only observed one set of golden tresses in the party;" and he glanced towards Flora's, which were bewitchingly displayed under a pretty little felt cap, turned up with purple velvet—for such was the fashion in those days of old.

"Spare me, please, Captain Stapleton; you know my opinion of compliments, spoken or looked," Flora replied, severely, but she enjoyed the clumsy flattery to the utmost.

"Not the slightest use in speaking the truth—one is never believed," said Stapleton, quite bitterly. Flora swallowed this too.

"I don't want to be talked to about myself. You surely can have no difficulty in obliging me so far. Where are you staying, do you say?"

"At a house called Rocklodge, in a very unfrequented part of the station. I told you at Chillum-pore how I was asked to come by relatives of my mother's—captain on the invalid list and his wife—quiet people—scarcely know anybody. I see young Budlee appears rather at home with Mrs. Ochter and her daughters," Stapleton said, hurrying off to another topic.

"Yes: he is a good deal with them; he appears a quiet, unassuming young man; I like him very much for the little I have seen of him."

"I am glad you do," said Stapleton, shortly (he knew, poor fellow, that he was expected by the lady to manifest some feeling of annoyance at her praise of Budlee). This parenthesis, again, is for the information of those, &c. &c.

"You are very kind to say so. But I have

no time to spare, as you call it, just now; and we may quarrel at last, without being able to make it up again. Do you intend calling soon at Beauclerc Cottage? I am very anxious you should."

"I shall, or will, to-morrow, at one of the clock post meridiem. I suppose I can't know you without knowing the people of the house; and I should be dreary without an occasional chat with you."

"I did not in the least mean that, Captain Stapleton. I know you would like the girls very much; you will be surprised to see how little their features resemble my husband's. You have never once inquired for Mr. Ochter, great friend of yours as he is."

"How is the unfortunate?—*Calypso ne peut pas se consoler*, eh? I hope you write him a long letter every day. Any chance of his coming?"

"Really, I must request, Captain Stapleton——"

"Now, now, don't be angry, please, Mrs. Ochter; when I said 'unfortunate,' I meant, in being separated from you—you know I did."

"You appear determined to be annoying this afternoon."

"I assure you that nothing would give me greater pain than to annoy you wilfully; you don't doubt this, do you?" said he, in an anxious tone.

"Then why sneer so at those I love most?" As she spoke, Flora looked rather earnestly at him, and flushed slightly.

"Probably from inherent viciousness, a family failing of the house of Stapleton."

"Rather a pleasant inheritance that, Captain Stapleton."

"Especially when one gets no money or estates along with it," he added; "but tell me something about mother Ochter and her maidens. Are there not three? I saw only two."

"The third, Louisa, never comes out; she is rather plain, and she frets and talks like an old maid; the others bear with her very patiently."

"That's the sort of girl I like. And the other two?"

"They are very nice girls indeed, but you must come and judge for yourself."

"So I will, Mrs. Ochter, but not to see them particularly. I suppose old mother Ochter watches them like a modern Hesperis."

"'Mother' Ochter again! I really must not listen to such coarse language, Captain Stapleton. What is a Hesperis? some shocking Hindostanee word, I have no doubt."

"No, no; one of a family of sisters, who had charge of an orchard long ago, with some remarkably fine golden pippins in it, which they were under orders not to let any one take or steal."

"Well! what has that to do with my mother-in-law?"

"Don't you see her daughters are her pippins, and she is ready to tear in pieces anybody that approaches them? I am afraid you are not at all classical, Mrs. Ochter."

"I think she would be rather wise in protecting them from you. What about those pretty rides you were to discover, Captain Stapleton?"

"I have them all marked out. Come and inspect the first to-morrow morning," he replied, rather eagerly.

"No, indeed! nothing of the sort; Esther and Gerty always come out with me, and you must pay a visit at the cottage first, and be formally introduced. But it is quite dark, I declare—I must gallop on. They are all at home long ago. Good-night!"

"Stay! your collar is flying all loose; it will be sure to drop off. Let me see it right."

She stopped and turned back, saying,

"Thanks; I should not like to have lost it. Hold Bushire and my whip for one moment; I can fasten it in an instant."

"Do let me," said Stapleton; "I understand all about it, but I don't know at all how to hold a horse and a whip."

"How childish you are!" she replied; "I feel certain, if I leave it to you, simple as it is, my poor collar will be lost."

She bent down a little as she spoke, and Stapleton commenced, it can be guessed how successfully, to adjust Flora's neck-gear. Dusk had just fallen, the road appeared deserted, and Flora innocently enjoyed his awkwardness.

"Is there no hook, or eye, or stud, or pin, or any arrangement to secure this by?" he said, holding the loose end of the collar. "Oh! here we are."

Flora screamed. "Oh! you have driven that pin ever so deep into my neck."

"I am very sorry; it is nearly all right now."

As he spoke, a sharp quick step, before unheard by the pair, went past them. Flora started, and sat up in her saddle.

"Who is that?" she said, in a tone of no little alarm.

"Some native or other," said Stapleton; "but what matter who it is?"

"None in the world," said Flora, greatly relieved, however. "Good-night, Captain Stapleton. Remember you must call to-morrow."

"Good-night," he said; "it is rather cruel not to give one even a finger at parting."

"Too late for formalities," was her reply; and she cantered boldly along the gloomy road to the cottage gate.

Much wonder had been wasted by her connections upon her remaining out so late. Mrs. Ochter

did not at all like it, though young Budlee told her she had stopped to talk to Captain Stapleton. Flora came in just as they were going to tea, breathless from her ride, saying,—

“I am afraid I am disgracefully late; but Captain Stapleton and I had so much to say about Chillum-pore and Henry, that I never noticed how late it was.”

“Why did you not ask him in?” said Mrs. Ochter, kindly hiding away from Flora any trace of annoyance.

“Dear, no! he must call on you; I am sure you will like him. Has Mr. Budlee not stayed?”

“No: he didn’t come farther than the garden; he left only a few minutes ago.”

This sent a chill to Flora’s heart. She had met nobody since she left Captain Stapleton, consequently Mr. Budlee must have passed them “that time.” He could have gone no road but the one they were on.

“Yet why should I feel uneasy,” said Flora to herself, “even if he did recognize us?”

Stapleton murmured to himself, walking homeward,—“If that fellow Budlee knew us—I dare

say he did, for I knew him directly—he will tell it all over Paharnauth; just the brute to do it, too. What a cursed fool I am! I wish Mrs. Flora had not left that poor devil of a husband of hers. I shall be late for dinner, and poor cousin Gingall will never forgive me. Looks a sweet girl, that Esther. Puts your light out altogether, Flora! Shouldn't wonder at Budlee's making up to Esther; young rip, impudent enough for anything."

In such sweet discourse with himself did Captain Stapleton reach Rocklodge at last. Budlee *did*, of course, recognize them, and did spread the story over Paharnauth; but that young officer's estimation for truth not being at a very high figure, instead of representing Stapleton, as was the fact, adjusting Mrs. Ochter's collar, he altered the state of affairs slightly, and declared that the gentleman's arms were round the lady's neck. No one would have received as true any statement of Mr. Budlee's on any other subject, but on this matter his veracity was not for a moment questioned. No man so often lies, and no man is so seldom accused of lying, as the scandal-monger.

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPORTANT DÉBUT.

HASTINGS ETHEREDGE McCUDDUM, Esq., secretary to the Momjamma Board, came to Paharnauth this eventful season, to enjoy his first holiday since his arrival in the country. He had worked hard for fifteen years, and, though bearing the humble title of secretary, he was looked upon as one of the most notable men in the service. The minutes and reports from the important board to which he was attached had made his reputation, as master-pieces of official writing and reasoning. The highest authorities bowed low to his statistics, and quailed before his tabulated statements; there was something striking to the most ordinary reader, even in the way the paragraphs were numbered. Altogether he bid fair to become an Indian statesman of no ordinary stamp. Mr. Clem Russud, of the Larch Runs, felt quite

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proud of the honour which Mr. H. E. McCuddum conferred upon him, in taking up his quarters in the house, and the state suite of rooms was prepared for his reception. One's first thought on beholding Mr. McCuddum was that Nature ought to have been ashamed of herself for providing so very indifferent a receptacle as the corporeal McCuddum for such a brilliant intellect as dwelt within him.

Without being suspected of any intention to lower this great civilian, I must be allowed to mention his resemblance, as far as the lower half of his face was concerned, to Hogarth's portrait of Mr. Jack Wilkes. He had the same awful mouth, displaying the same description of teeth, as Mr. Jack Wilkes possessed ; but unlike the gleaming, malicious optic of the portrait, Mr. McCuddum's eyes, though feeble and colourless, were straight in his head. He had no brow to speak of, and his hair was—to be as mild as possible—sandy. His figure was long, lank, and shapeless, and his garments corresponded. Such is a rough sketch of this illustrious man, who is now standing at one of the large front windows of the Larch Runs, looking rather vacantly over a gorgeous

panorama of hill and vale. It might be supposed that Mr. McCuddum, whose view for so many years before had been bounded by three tiers of pigeon-holes, stuffed with parcels of papers, would have enjoyed very much the more extended scenery of the Hills. Alas, no! poor Mr. McCuddum is at this moment the unhappiest man in Paharnauth. Deprived of his work, unable to smoke or drink, or play cards or billiards, or to walk, or ride, or shoot, he is necessarily wretched. He has even lost his faculty of reading anything but written documents which require immediate and elaborate answer; none such are there in the Larch Runs.

Poor Mr. Russud, who was so rejoiced at his advent, is after a few days fairly crushed by the mighty McCuddum.

"I don't know what the devil to do with him, ma'am," he said, quite violently, to his wife, who mildly remarked to her husband that she feared their guest must find it dull. "In heaven's name, suggest something. I tried him with billiards; I tried him with rackets; I proposed a run into the interior for a few days; I wanted him to come into

the club : he won't do anything. I had no notion he was such a tremendous muff," said the lively old judge, who was game for anything.

"Have you thought of taking him out to call upon the people? If you manage well, you may get him to join you; and there you have occupation for months. Who knows, he may want to marry; it is very strange that he does not!" said Mrs. Russud, inquisitively.

Her husband, throwing away his cheroot, resolved to act upon his wife's advice at once, and returned to the room where, after breakfast, he had left his incubus.

"Not a bad view that," said Mr. Russud, approaching; "though I confess I like the plains better; there is a better prospect from the left window, McCuddum."

"It is indeed a noble expanse! What riches, mineral and agricultural, as yet unsought for, or feebly developed, must that verdant valley contain! Under what form of tenure do the fertile lands beneath us lie? A proposal for the readjustment, at an early date, of the settlements, fixed perhaps in the first instance, and under urgent circumstances,

without due attention to the claims of the cultivator, has been lately forwarded to my office."

Thus spoke, fluently and calmly, the talented secretary to his host, who heard with awe and answered,—

"I don't know anything of this part of the country, my dear fellow. You ought not to think of work now; plenty of time for that after, when you get back to the office. I want you to come out calling. Plenty of pretty girls to see here. When we were on the Mall the other night, there was no end of 'em looking after you. Come, get on your hat and another coat. I'll show you the way to-day. My wife will take charge of you the next time. We must go first to make salaam to Mrs. Posteen."

So old Clem talked and bustled about his guest, most anxious to drag him off to the only occupation Paharnauth offered for so lifeless a subject.

Mr. McCuddum was quite startled by the judge's proposition. It knocked him off his official stilts, which he had somewhat unconsciously mounted. The fact was, the secretary, when left alone, being destitute of employment for his thoughts, betook himself

to the mental composition of a letter upon an imaginary question connected with his office work, which the view from the Larch Runs window suggested. The first sentence or two, roughly hewn, he delivered as we have seen above, to Mr. Clem Russud, who was well acquainted with his style, though he had not before known that he talked official. However, by the time the judge had finished talking, the secretary was awake again, or rather restored to the world outside margin foolscap and "service" envelopes.

"One ought to call upon her, at all events," he replied; "but I have never had time to pay many visits since I entered the service, and it is rather late to begin now. I don't object to join you if you have any calls to make, but it is scarcely worth my while."

"How not worth your while, McCuddum? Do you think visiting a bore?"

"Not exactly that; as I have just said, I never allowed myself a fair opportunity of judging: but the fact is, I intend to shorten my leave considerably, and get back to my work. I can't do without some

settled business. Want of employment is a punishment to me."

"I thought as much; but look here, Mac, you fancy you can't enjoy yourself here, but you have never tried. I didn't expect you could stand much longer mooning about among the cabbages and greens in the garden out there; that would kill anybody. I was very miserable when I came here first, and discontented with everything; now I am as jolly as possible. Nothing like a good go of pukka idleness; there's no physic equal to it. Come, get your hat. When you know some people, you will be of a very different mind, depend upon it. Wouldn't Ussil be glad if he knew there was any chance of your coming back soon. I don't know how the devil he gets on without you."

Mr. McCuddum, unwilling to put any slight upon the hospitable old judge's plans for his amusement, concealed from him without much effort the great dismay he felt at having to accompany him. In his office, or in his dealings with men, he was as brave as a lion. No one could wig a magistrate, snub a planter, or silence a missionary more courageously

than he ; but in the presence of ladies he was as shy as a strange dog. This was through no want of consciousness of his great abilities, nor was it the result of sensitiveness on the score of his ill looks, for he was entirely unaware of this latter drawback, as it used to be considered formerly. Dissolute habits, more than any other cause I know, are at the bottom of the aversion to lady society which many profess, but Mr. Secretary McCuddum could be charged with none such. He was simply a bashful man ; and, worse still, he was bashful without being unsophisticated or Dominie Samsonish. He had resolved long before to marry. He knew that he could command the best lot in the market ; but he found himself so helpless, so embarrassed, so utterly destitute of all powers of speech or thought in the presence of the humblest specimen of feminine humanity under five-and-forty, that he had almost resolved to succumb to his failing, and live and die single.

Few men, at once plain and bashful, are attractive ; but Mr. McCuddum was a bright exception—he was the most attractive man of the season at Paharnauth. None of my readers are, it is to be

hoped, so obtuse as not to see clearly why he was the cynosure of all the eyes of all the maidens. Every "spin" in the station fell in love with him at first sight, with the exception, perhaps, of the Beauclerc Cottage girls. When he passed them one evening, staring uneasily forward, as bashful men do when they suspect they are being looked at, Gerty burst out laughing so loud that her mother trembled to think he may have heard her, and she said to her elder sister,—

"Did you ever see such an animal, Esty? I wonder Jock didn't fly at him. What can he be?"

"Probably a clerk in one of the tradesmen's shops. I hope the poor creature didn't hear you laughing; you are dreadful, Gertrude."

"I really don't see anything to laugh at, Esther," said their mother, who was shocked to see her eldest daughter's sense of the ridiculous quite as much aroused as Gertrude's. "That is one of the cleverest and best placed men in the Civil Service." She could not have meant a higher compliment, if she called him the cleverest man in the world.

"I am sorry I laughed at him, mamma, but he is

such a strange figure I really could not help it," Esther pleaded.

"I thought his figure quite fascinating," said Gertrude, looking at her sister and going off again. Esther could not but laugh too, though she knew it must vex their mother.

The brightest hope of Mrs. Ochter's existence was, that Mr. McCuddum might be taken by one of her girls. Every other lady, who had a daughter, hoped the same. All looked with impatience, sharpened by a feeling of competition, to his appearance at the large balls or parties, or, at least, as a visitor at their houses; but he had not come to be conquered apparently, and an occasional glimpse of the universal charmer on the roads was all that could be obtained for many days after he came upon the scene. Mrs. Ochter lectured her daughters severely, without venturing to declare to them why she took up Mr. McCuddum's defence so warmly. There was something decided in Esther's character, which made the good lady hesitate about instructing her how she ought to lay siege to Mr. McCuddum; as for Gertrude, though she had lately become much

more womanly in conversation and manner, still her mother could do nothing with her; and poor Louisa was utterly despaired of.

The next day after this rencontre, Gertrude and Esther, with several other girls, were spending the day at Medmenham Towers. Mrs. Posteen was a lone woman. Her children were in England, and her husband did not count. She was the greatest female personage in the station, but gracious withal, and very fond of getting as many pretty girls as she could to help her through the day. She used to unbend in their company, but froze up again directly if any colonel's or brigadier's wife ventured to call. The young ladies, when once they knew Mrs. Posteen, without her ceremony-air on, were delighted to be invited to Medmenham Towers. There they chatted and chattered, and got the nicest possible things to eat and drink, and arranged fancy dresses for a coming ball, or helped Mrs. Posteen in her preparations for her famous concerts and evenings at home.

Gertrude and Esther enjoyed her house very much like the rest, and the latter was particularly

favoured by Mrs. Posteen, who, however, thought her a little affected; for Esther would not, even to this great lady, acknowledge that to make a conquest was the chief ambition of her heart.

A party composed of the above element was seated in one of the reception rooms in the fine house, when two cards were brought in.

"What can this mean?" said Mrs. Posteen, indignantly. "I gave the most particular instructions that no cards should be received to-day. Ah! Mr. Russud and Mr. McCuddum. I suppose they are to be considered privileged. Admit them!"

Esther and Gertrude looked at each other, thinking of their lecture of yesterday, while the other young ladies disposed of themselves and their dresses to the best advantage, with a now-or-never sort of feeling.

Messrs. Russud and McCuddum, the latter feeling unhappy, but burning with that desire to make a favourable impression which is the bane of the genuinely bashful man, and which adds considerably to his sufferings, reached without impediment the hall door of Medmenham Towers. To their

astonishment, however, on presenting their respective cards, they were declined by the janitor, who presented them with a book and a pen. The judge was furious.

“What will this woman come to next? I thought she had more sense than to ape a governor’s wife. Such infernal nonsense I never heard of. Gad! if this brute refuses to take in our cards, I shall write a few of my opinions in this, like a dâk bungalow book, faith! We are not going to put our names here under, let us see, Lieutenant Durbeen. What’s this next column? Residence—Kilta Club. Ensign Chumdra, ditto. Nice reception this at the door of a couple I have known for the last thirty years.”

The servants, guessing the visitors to be people of importance, took in their cards, as we have seen, Mr. Clem Russud knew nothing of the internal economy of Medmenham Towers. This book of Mrs. Posteen’s was a device of hers, to keep off the shoals of subs and military men of sorts, and at the same time to secure their coming to her house when they were wanted. A man who sends

in his card, and is refused admission more than once, will not, if he is of the average description, again come near a house where he has been so treated. But let him write his name in a book, and he is awe-stricken by such a solemn process, and goes off contented. It looked certainly something like presumption upon Mrs. Posteen's part, to imitate the greatest people in the land in this respect, but it undoubtedly increased her consequence.

Mr. Russud's wrath had not cooled down by the time he reached the presence; and his guest having been saluted by the lady, and deposited shivering on a chair (without any greater misfortune than the loss of his hat, which accidentally dropped, and, being made of some elastic material, bumped across the floor to the feet of Gerty, where it lay, to the misery of the owner and her great gratification), the judge at once commenced:—

“Why, Mrs. Posteen, I fancied at the door I had made some mistake, and come to the Lieutenant-Governor of the South-East's house.”

“How was that?” she replied. “He is not here, you know very well.”

"His visitors' book is, though. Is Mr. Posteen officiating?"

"I am obliged to imitate him so far; the young officers do infest one so."

"Of course; I must order my wife to get one directly. Now invent some plan to make them ride quietly on the Mall. I think the only way is, to keep the young ladies at home when they go out, and *vice versa*. You would all approve of it highly, I am sure, ladies. What do you say, McCuddum?"

The secretary's ears were closed, for his powerful intellect was at the moment directed to the consideration of different plans, more or less elaborate, for the recovery of his hat. His eyes were fixed beseechingly upon it, and the girls in the room had ample opportunity of studying the features of the great civilian.

"Mrs. Posteen is speaking to you," said the judge, maliciously, in a louder tone.

Mr. McCuddum started, and fixed his affrighted gaze on the first face which met his eye. It happened to be Esther's. She pitied the poor man very much, and happened just then to be watching him with

her kindest expression, not at all expecting to be discovered in the act. Though her eyes dropped directly, her glance of a moment gave the shy secretary more confidence than he had ever felt before in female society : he turned to Mrs. Posteen, and said, with a boldness which quite astonished him afterwards when he reflected upon it,—

“ I beg your pardon, I really was not attending to the conversation.”

“ Mr. Russud was complaining of the hard riding upon the roads,” Mrs. Posteen said, kindly. The *gaucherie* of a genius is easily pardoned.

“ I didn’t notice it particularly,” he answered.

This opinion of his raised him higher than before, if that was possible, in the estimation of the young women assembled. They had all, of course, noticed his extreme bashfulness and awkwardness, his ungainly figure, and his forbidding countenance ; but these defects, physical and unphysical, were bathed in a golden light, through the medium of which they appeared rather pleasing than otherwise to everybody except Esther and Gertrude. The last-mentioned young person was studying him care-

fully all over for the amusement of Louisa and Flora when she got home, not without a hope, too, of disabusing mamma of the immense opinion of Mr. McCuddum that that wise lady entertained.

“I was nearly killed the other morning, that’s all,” Mr. Russud said, his passion rising at the remembrance of his injuries. “My only solah was swept off and trampled upon, and I had the most providential escape from being thrown over the khud.”

Poor Esther! her habit-skirt had done Mr. Russud’s hat this injury, for he was not a very tall man. She felt herself blushing—most dreadfully, as Gerty said afterwards, who had heard all about it previously, and who, of course, looked towards Esther at the end of Mr. Russud’s speech.

“Your only protection would be to ride with the young ladies yourself, Mr. Russud. Do you make a long stay in the Hills, Mr. McCuddum? No likelihood, I suppose, of Mr. and Mrs. Ussil’s honouring Paharnauth this season?” said Mrs. Posteen, who would have been miserable indeed if another luminary, moving too in her orbit, were to appear, and necessarily diminish her splendour.

"I should say not, this year," replied the secretary; "they have some idea of going home early in the cold season."

He felt more and more courageous; and on Mrs. Posteen's again beginning a conversation with Mr. Russud, he ventured a cautious look towards Esther. Her face was still in a glow, and she was looking at nothing, with that wonderful composure of feature which only women can attain.

Another terrible crisis, however, was coming for poor McCuddum. This was anything but a white-chalk day for him. There were three children, just emerged from infancy, in the house,—young sisters of two of the "come-out" nymphs who were spending the day at Medmenham Towers. They had been wandering about, as children will, and came back at last to the room in which the visitors were seated. They were very pretty, amiable little girls, or they would not have been admitted within the precincts of the stately mansion. Like most Indian children, they were not afraid of visitors: so they walked boldly into the room after a romp. The youngest was a vigilant little creature, with large antelope eyes, and

the transparently white skin and delicately pink colour, which make Anglo-Saxon children in the Hills more beautiful, I believe, than their brothers and sisters at home. The latter are finer little animals, to be sure—plump, ruddy, and somewhat coarse, and possessed of more life and spirit than the Indian born, but they are not nearly so interesting. The little things one sees in the Hills have almost all been previously long enough in the plains to have been made delicate, if not positively sickly. The change works wonders, but it does not altogether efface the traces of the mischief done by heat, confinement, and privation of amusement in the open air. They are at best little human exotics; and this may be the reason of their being more attractive than children at home, just as a pining exotic in a conservatory is more tenderly looked after and cherished than the most vigorous indigenous plant.

Little Julie Shamma very quickly espied Mr. McCuddum's hat, and made straight for it. He saw her object, but he had not the courage to interpose. She seized her prey, and, having satis-

fied herself that it was not a footstool, proceeded gravely to try it on. Having got it well on the back of her head, she turned round to see the effect produced upon the spectators. The moment she saw Mr. McCuddum's face, which was made more formidable than usual by the horror her movements caused to appear upon it, she shrieked wildly, and made a rush to the door. Esther, actuated by one of her generous impulses, and regardless, it is to be feared, of the strict proprieties, followed her; and though poor Julie's terrors could not be allayed, she rescued the secretary's hat, which she presented to him gracefully.

The secretary felt grateful to her for a second time during his short visit, and was very glad to get away soon after with Mr. Russud, carrying with him very agreeable remembrances of the gentle Esther, which made Paharnauth somehow appear a much pleasanter place to him in the afternoon than it had in the morning. He said no more about returning to his chair in the Momjamma board-room. Mrs. Russud found him extremely lively that evening, and next day, when she told him she was going

to pay a visit at Beauclerc Cottage, he proposed himself to accompany her. These important indications were not lost upon the discernment of the jolly judge's wife.

Esther's conduct was pronounced, when her departure allowed them to discuss it, in the highest degree reprehensible by all the young ladies who witnessed it. Gertrude condemned her at home merely as a spoilsport; she should not on any account have interfered with Julie: but Florence and Emily Shamma, and the others who had been well brought up, took a much more serious view of the case. They declared they had no idea that Miss Ochter was so forward a person, that the way she thrust herself upon Mr. McCuddum's notice was "beyond all" (while the writer uses this last phrase, he can make no attempt to interpret it). No young lady, whose motives were at all decorous, could behave as she had done. They had, indeed, heard of young persons—they would not call them ladies—laying traps for husbands, but they had never seen it done so audaciously, and would not believe it unless it occurred before their very eyes.

Even Mrs. Posteen's faith in Esther was shaken ; she made no scruple about hinting to her that her behaviour was very extraordinary.

"I have no doubt, my dear, that you have made a most favourable impression," she said, with other cutting little speeches, which brought tears of indignation into her eyes.

The poor girl was innocent, but her character was greatly lowered in the minds of all the select ladies in the station, who very properly considered no indiscretion more unpardonable than Miss Ochter's. They were thankful that their daughters, at all events, could not be accused of such wanton conduct. Gerty told the whole story at home, with such exaggerations and colouring as might be expected from that young lady, endowed as she was with a very vivid imagination. Esther, who returned harassed by Mrs. Posteen's petty sarcasms, retreated when her sister, who was not to be silenced, began her narration of the events of the day. Flora, who understood Esther's mind better than anybody, felt that nothing could be more unjust than suspecting her as other people did, and said so ; but not

without that agreeable sensation which, according to a good and well-known authority, the hearing of the discomfiture of one's friends always awakens. Mrs. Ochter, though she was pained to think that her daughter should have laid herself open to remark, was rather pleased on the whole. In the case of such a catch as Mr. McCuddum, one might be excused for passing the limits of legitimate tactics. If, as Gerty said, he looked so very grateful to Esther, he was not likely to forget her. The whole thing was accidental, no doubt; she could not persuade herself that Esther meant anything; but then it might lead to something, and Mrs. Ochter indulged herself in dreams in which Esther figured to great advantage as a Mrs.

That injured young woman, for whom I trust my readers feel a due amount of compassion, cried herself to sleep, weary of the world and the wickedness of everybody in it.

"*She* want to engage the affections of an ugly, stupid, bashful, tongue-tied old Indian! dear me!" I fear she was very severe upon poor Mr. McCuddum. In the long talk to herself she indulged

in, she made all sorts of cruel resolutions ; and next day, when mamma, in a high state of exultation, came to Esther's room to announce that Mr. McCuddum had actually called, and was then in the drawing-room with Mrs. Russud, said her head ached so, that to move was torture. Her mother was thunderstruck. She begged and entreated for a quarter of an hour in vain ; then she very naturally declared that Esther's greatest pleasure was thwarting her poor mother as much as she could ; that she was worse than Louisa ; that her daughter-in-law was more dutiful than any of her daughters, &c. Tears at last were plentifully shed on both sides, and those on the maternal side gained the day. When sunshine was restored, Esther was led down by her mother, believing herself a martyr, and with sensations similar to those of Miss Iphigenia, the heroine of a very ancient romance, of whom Esther probably had never heard.

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